LOVING AS ONE: CREATING A MISSIONAL COMMUNITY IN A NEWLY FEDERATED CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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by
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This project's context was SonRise Church, a rural church located in West Central Ohio. The problem was the congregation lacked a unified mission and vision to direct them forward in ministry. If a common mission and vision were developed by the congregation, an increased sense of community would develop within the congregation. This project was conducted over six weeks. Data was collected utilizing pre-project and post-project surveys, group discussions, brainstorming, and individual interviews. As a result, church members would experience an increased sense of community and a renewed purpose for long-term ministry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for United Theological Seminary and its leadership, who made this possible. I am especially grateful to Rev. Dr. Michael Beck, and Rev. Dr. Rosario Picardo, faculty advisors who have shared their insights and lavished support and encouragement upon me during this process. I am also grateful for the entire cohort of peers as we walked this path together and especially the soon to be Rev. Dr. Sadell Bradley and Rev. Dr. Travis Smith whose common tenacity brought us to this point together. I share my appreciation to my professional associates, Rev. Dr. James C. Wilson, Rev. Dr. Christopher Heckaman, Dr. Marilyn Evans, and Rev. Dr. Pete Heinrich, as well as colleague and friend Rev. Dr. Tom Schotterback, who encouraged me along the way.

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I am eternally grateful to my family who prodded me along the way, encouraged me, supported me, sacrificed so much so that I could serve in mission and ministry. Thank you to Megan and Beth Anne, the best kids ever, to my mom for your love and

support, to my daddy who went to live with Jesus along the way, but I knew you were still cheering me on. Thank you to my sister and brother, Charean and Tom for the encouragement; to Janice for keeping it all in perspective; to Sandy and Kerry for your help; to Chris, Stacy, Alexia, Brandon, Asia, and Adah for your understanding and patience while I was busy doing homework; and of course, to my husband, Steve, for your love and support along the way, and always, having a glass of chocolate milk waiting for me. I love you all.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving husband, Steve. You never gave up on me. My prayer is that others may learn from this work and move the church forward in mission and ministry that all may know the love of Jesus Christ.

ABBREVIATIONS

ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
GPS	Global Positioning System
SOS	Southern Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
UMC	United Methodist Church
WOC	West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, **21** that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **22** I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— **23** I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

—John 17:2-23, NIV

INTRODUCTION

Historically, every ship required a compass to assist in its navigation. Compasses showed where the ship was headed. Without a compass, the vessel could drift aimlessly and veer off course. The same is true today however, modern ships often use a combination of a compass and a global positioning system (GPS) to navigate open waters.

Similarly, a clearly defined mission and vision statement could serve as a compass or a GPS indicating where a church or other organization was headed. Casting a vision for a church was an essential component of long-term church health and ministry effectiveness. Unfortunately, many churches lacked a clear understanding of why having a mission or vision was necessary, and how to go about creating and communicating those statements. Mission and vision statements are crucial for churches as they define the church's purpose, guide decision making, and create a unified culture.

SonRise Church is a small, rural church located in Ithaca, Ohio. The SonRise congregation is a federation of the United Methodist Church (UMC) and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). These congregations, two United Methodist and one Lutheran, joined together for convenience and survival. At the heart of SonRise Church was their love of their neighbor and common desire to focus on serving others. The federation became official on December 1, 2023. It was evident that the members lacked a unified approach to ministry and understanding of their mission. Their ideas

sometimes even conflicted, regarding their purpose, and priorities. The goal of this project was to unify the newly merged and federated congregation to have an increased sense of community and a renewed focus for long-term ministry.

The problem addressed in this project was: "In a newly merged and federated congregation, if we develop a common mission and vision statement for the church, then members will have an increased sense of community and renewed purpose for long-term ministry." As we began to create the mission and vision statements for SonRise Church, it was necessary to know and understand the mission and vision statements for each parent denomination. The churchwide mission of the ELCA was "Doing God's work in the world and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ."[1] The vision statement of the ELCA was: "A world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation."[2] The ELCA stated purpose was to: "Activate each of us so more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love."[3] Similarly, the mission of the UMC was: "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."[4] Further, the book of discipline explains that this is accomplished, "by proclaiming the good news of God's grace and by exemplifying Jesus' command to love God and neighbor, thus seeking the fulfillment of God's reign and realm in the world."[5]

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[1] "Churchwide Organization," ELCA.org. https://elca.org/About/Churchwide.

[2] "Vision and Purpose," ELCA.org, https://elca.org/About/Vision-and-Purpose.

[3] "Vision and Purpose," ELCA.org, https://elca.org/About/Vision-and-Purpose.

[4] "Mission Statement of the United Methodist Church," The United Methodist Church, December 18, 2008, https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-120-ff-section-1-the-churches.

[5] "Mission Statement of the United Methodist Church," The United Methodist Church, December 18, 2008, https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-120-ff-section-1-the-churches.

With these statements as a backdrop for this work, SonRise Church worked to develop and implement new mission and vision statements and identified core values for the new church ministry. According to Thomas McElheny, a church mission statement was "an essential part of your ministry. It defines your church's very purpose."[6] McElheny said that a mission statement could unify a congregation by providing a clear vision, fostering a sense of unity, and motivating members to participate and contribute.[7] The recent merger of these churches created a need for unity and direction for SonRise Church.

This document includes chapters on my ministry context for the project and includes biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations that inform this project. Chapter one details the ministry context of this project and how my experience at SonRise Church led to this project. The last chapter is an analysis of the project and recommendations for future work in this area. An overview of the foundational chapters follows.

Biblical Foundation

Chapter two provides a biblical foundation for this project focused on Ephesians 4:1-16. This letter reflected on God's desire for the church and God's plan for the world. Its purpose expounded on the blessings enjoyed by the church, stressed the unity of the

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[6] McElheny, Thomas. "Tips for Writing a Church Mission Statement." ChurchPlaza, June 17, 2024. https://www.churchplaza.com/writing-a-mission-statement-for-your-church, 1.

[7] Thomas McElheny. "Tips for Writing a Church Mission Statement." ChurchPlaza, June 17, 2024, https://www.churchplaza.com/writing-a-mission-statement-for-your-church, 2.

body of Christ, and encouraged believers in the ways of Christ. Christian unity, as described in this pericope, provided a biblical basis for the development of common mission and vision statements at SonRise Church, with the intent that these statements created unity in the body and moved the church forward together.

According to Christian educator and author Frank Gaebelein, conventional religious thought declined in the first century. This decline left room for a variety of pagan religious groups to offer deliverance from evil and a search for unity. Thus, an interest in building unity among the people grew.[8] Paul taught that unity could be found in Christ alone. In our self-promoting world, Ephesians differs. It called people to lead with love. Unity in Christ extended beyond the church to all creation. Gaebelein supported this, saying, "God's ultimate purpose is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."[9] We are called to be one body.

The unity that Paul called for is not uniformity; rather it was a call to a common purpose that centered on unity in our belief of Christ as Lord and Savior. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to be a part of this unity, which was required to be a spiritually effective church. Paul appealed to believers to live in a way that expressed a new creation in unity. This unity included respect and appreciation for the differences in beliefs, lifestyle, and theology. It focused on common understandings that led to mature faith in Christ.

In the case of SonRise Church, the goal for unity was with the three long-standing churches that stemmed from two different historically reformational denominations, the United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The

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[8] Frank E Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible. Vol 11; Ephesians-Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 14.

[9] Gaebelein, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 14.

exhortation of Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians "to bear together in love" helped to address the need for unity in newly federated and merged congregations. As SonRise Church developed a new mission statement at the grassroots level, and worked into a new vision, the goal was to become a more cohesive team to work together in ministry and mission to God through Jesus Christ. Chapter two provides a more in-depth look at this biblical foundation.

Historical Foundation

In chapter three, the historical foundation of this project focused on Count Nickolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Count Zinzendorf was an early proponent of ecumenical partnerships and unity among Christians. His work served as a basis for the emerging ministry and mission at SonRise Church.

Count Zinzendorf was a transformative influence in the 18th century. Born a high-ranking nobleman, he set aside his privilege to serve Jesus Christ. Count Zinzendorf's life demonstrated the importance of ecumenical relationships. A Lutheran nobleman who held deep pietist roots, a Lutheran clergyperson and a Moravian bishop, Zinzendorf served as a church leader with connections to the Evangelical Revival, the Anglican Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. He tried to reconcile the contrasting traditions of the Moravian refugees with representatives from other denominations who settled on his estate. A brotherly agreement was achieved, and their life together strengthened their community around one mission. This mission was to increase Christ's kingdom. His goal

was to develop cooperative relationships with regional European churches as well as churches in mission territories.[10]

Count Zinzendorf formulated a personal theology that reflected his fascination in ecumenism. His personal focus on heart-piety was central to his approach to ecumenism. He considered the heart to be the source of religious knowledge. The heart-piety was not a feeling or emotion; it was a deep internal knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior. Consequently, the unified church community was based on a shared experience and deep understanding of Jesus Christ who leads the community in the traditions of the church.

As SonRise Church developed new mission and vision statements, the goal was to become a more unified team so that their work would be more effective and have a greater impact on the world. This process was undertaken in a way that the community would grow in faith and mature in their relationship with Christ. The theology of Count Zinzendorf served as a basis for the emerging ministry and mission at SonRise Church as the congregation focused on the things that united them instead of the things that divided them. Chapter three explores more of the work of Count Nikolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf.

Theological Foundation

Chapter four details the theological foundation of this project, which focuses on the Priesthood of all Believers. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers proclaimed that those who have a common faith in Christ also shared in the Christ's royal priesthood.

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[10] Arthur J. Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf: an ecumenical pioneer," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36 no. 3/4 (Summer/Fall1999): 291.

Every believer had equal access to [God] through Jesus without a human mediator.[11] Every believer also had the responsibility to exercise their priesthood. While not everyone is called to teach or preach the word of God, all were called by God to do something that will build upon their faith and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the same time, a clear functional difference existed among individual Christians. Martin Luther, a German priest and seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation who developed the doctrine of priesthood of all believers, never lost sight of the fact that God established the public pastoral office through the congregation's call and for its sake.[12] Not all are called to be pastoral leaders; nor do all believers have the same work to do.

As the believers at SonRise Church worked to discern, recognize, and live into their roles in this new federated church community, love of God and neighbor remained central to their work. Members in leadership roles responded to the mission and vision of the church and the creation and maintenance of unity within the community of believers.[13] In response, believers moved from being observers to participants in the work of the church and remained open to the transforming power of God.

Through this transforming power of God, the church worked together to identify their mission and vision as well as redefined who they are as a community of believers.

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[11] Rachel Ciano, "Luther's Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers: The Importance for Today." *Credo Magazine.* January 8, 2020, 2.

[12] Davidson Razafiarivony, "A Biblical Assessment of Luther's View of Priesthood of all Believers and he Office of Ministry," *The American Journal of Biblical Theology,* 22 no 22 (May 30, 2021):10.

[13] Clifford Hill, and Monica Hill. "The Priesthood of All Believers," *International Congregational Journal* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 129. https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.ohiolink.edu:9100/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=109452044&site=ehost-live.

The church rediscovered its unity and function as a flexible, dynamic, and Holy Spirit energized community. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers served as a foundation to empower the SonRise Church congregation to function missionally. Clergy and laity worked together to define and fulfill the mission of the church, which served as the cornerstone for the community of faith as they began to move forward. Chapter four is a further explanation of how the priesthood of all believers empowered the leadership of the church.

Interdisciplinary Foundation

Chapter five details the interdisciplinary foundation of this project and focuses on designing compelling mission and vision statements. Designing compelling mission and vision statements are critical to the success of any organization. This project provided participants an opportunity to explore the local history and theology of each church and denomination and then develop a common mission statement and vision statement for the newly federated church. The common mission became the cornerstone for the community of faith to direct their work toward creating a congregational community where everyone has a role and a responsibility to share God's love with others.

Strong, clear mission and vision statements were essential elements for guiding the church toward a unified purpose. Mission and vision statements at SonRise Church clarified the church's core values and shaped the direction of worship, faith development activities, and outreach in the local area and beyond. Developing mission and vision statements involved answering key questions about the church's purpose and the call that God has on the lives of those in the church. They began the work to inform the strategic

action and future of the church. The church's desire was to make a lasting impact on the community and the world, so the development of exciting vision and mission statements was key in leading people's lives toward faith, hope, and transformation.

As SonRise Church worked to build a unified culture of community, it was imperative that the leadership engaged with the new mission and vision statements to develop a unified approach to ministry. Chapter five explores how the mission and vision statements helped to build a cohesive leadership for the church. Chapter six will bring the research project together in a final analysis and summary of learnings.

Conclusion

The foundational work for this project presented a significant biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary support for the development of mission and vision statements for the newly merged and federated church. It resulted in an increased sense of community and renewed purpose for long-term ministry. While many people will be skeptical of the effectiveness and success of merged churches, and even more, the success of federated churches, these foundations provide a basis for the potential success of such endeavors as illustrated in this Doctor of Ministry research project.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

As a student at Northern Arizona University, I was required to pass a statistics class to obtain my master's degree. The professor explained that all our exams, including the final exam, would be taken as a small group. His reasoning was "all of us is better than one of us." Of course, it was true. The grades in our group were improved by our ability to collaborate on projects and exams. After 16 weeks together, we developed a synergy, a powerful sense of teamwork and cooperation that far outweighed what we could have done on our own. This chapter outlines the synergy, the powerful relationship between my ministry skills and interests with the needs of my context at SonRise Church. It offers a brief outline and the anticipated goals of the project.

Ministry Context

SonRise Church is a small rural church located in Ithaca, Ohio. This congregation was a federation of the United Methodist Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The federation became official on December 1, 2023. The pathway to federation included many turns over two decades. Eventually, two congregations of the United Methodist Churches and one congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America were able to navigate the pathway and officially join as one body of Christ.

While this was the first federation of United Methodists and Evangelical Lutherans in Ohio,[1] the process did not begin with that intent. These congregations merged for convenience and financial survival. At the heart of SonRise Church was their members' love of their neighbor and common desire to focus on a mission to serve the poor. One previous pastor said, "This is the most generous church I have ever served."[2]

SonRise Church met in the building of the former Ithaca United Methodist Church. The formal beginnings of Ithaca United Methodist Church began in 1838, with the Methodist and the United Brethren in Christ denominations hosting a combined revival in Ithaca, Ohio.[3] Services were held in a log schoolhouse and continued to serve these groups for the next two years. In 1856, the Methodists built a brick church that was destroyed by fire in January 1904.[4] It was rebuilt by November of that same year, and in 1952, the church added an educational wing.

On April 13, 1954, a fuel tank from an Air National Guard airplane accidentally dropped onto the church. The explosion and resulting fire destroyed the church.[5] While no one was injured, only three outside walls were left standing. The congregation was stunned, and it emboldened their desire to worship. They gathered for the next two years in a local lodge, using chancel furniture loaned by the nearby Gordon Methodist Church.

The church historian, Beulah Stump writes,

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[1] Rev Robert Abrams, SonRise Church Sermon, Ithaca, OH, October 22, 2023.

[2] Rev. Marla Brown, Retired Elder, SonRise Church. Conversation with author, May 18, 2023.

[3] Beulah Stump, *Ithaca United Methodist Church Directory,* March 1975, 2.

[4] Stump, *Ithaca United Methodist Church Directory, 2.*

[5] Stump, *Ithaca United Methodist Church Directory,* 2.

> Four days later, on Easter Sunday, a capacity crowd gathered in the temporary arrangement…. On that Easter Day, no new hats were noticed or Easter finery visible; a very humbled people were thankful to God that no loss of life had occurred during the terrible catastrophe. These people – some very young, some old, some very crippled with arthritis – climbed two long flights of stairs, asking God for strength and courage. The Christian world was celebrating Christ's victory over the grave, so it seemed that God gave us the courage to rise and overcome our catastrophe.
>
> After many difficult conferences with the Air Force...and the untiring efforts of congressman McCullough of Piqua to push legislation through Congress, a generous settlement was granted.[6]

In December 1956, the congregation moved into their new building. The church continued to grow and focus on the work to which God had called them.

Seven miles to the east of Ithaca, Ohio, was the village of Pitsburg, Ohio. Henry Snyder was the railroad agent serving in Pitsburg, Ohio, and a God-fearing man.[7] In 1890, community leaders lead by Henry Snyder began building their first church, a Union Church, and a place for all denominations to worship. The church held its first worship service in 1891.[8] Since there was no appointed pastor, and no conference in control of the church, the anticipation of a Union Church for the People of All Faiths, ended up a hopeless dream as it lacked leadership and direction. The building was purchased in 1896 by the Methodist Episcopal church who began worshipping there.[9]

In 1968, the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged and became known as the United Methodist Church; the Pitsburg church became

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[6] Stump, *Ithaca United* Methodist *Church Directory,* 2.

[7] Gilbert, John E., *History of the Pitsburg, Ohio Grace M.E. Church* (Pitsburg, OH: Grace ME Church, 1947), 1.

[8] Gilbert, John E., *History of the Pitsburg, Ohio Grace M.E. Church,*1.

[9] Gilbert, *History of Pitsburg, Ohio Grace M.E. Church,1.*

known as the Pitsburg Grace United Methodist Church. The Pitsburg Grace Church served the Pitsburg area for almost forty years. In 2001, a decline in the economy and decrease in membership forced the Pitsburg Grace United Methodist Church to merge with the Ithaca United Methodist Church.[10] The two churches became one and retained the name Pitsburg Grace United Methodist Church.

Three miles to the east of Ithaca and five miles to the south of Pitsburg is the village of Gordon, Ohio. Gordon was laid out in 1849. It was located at the intersection of the Dayton and Union and Ohio Electric railroads.[11] However, even before the town was platted, Methodism began in Gordon. In 1830, a few Methodist families gathered in the home of the Ashley family for regular worship.[12] In 1835, Edmond Thomas bought the Ashley farm, and he was appointed the class leader.

Their first building was completed in 1861, and it wasn't long before the congregation outgrew it. In November 1901, construction on their new church building was completed and dedicated. Gordon Church continued to focus on ministry, community outreach, and faith development for the next several decades. Their membership grew and shrank based on the personality of the pastor serving at the time and societal trends. In the mid–2010s, the church entered a time of growth. It received a generous endowment that was used for necessary upgrades to the building and to support

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[10] Rev John Gilmore, Retired Elder, Gordon United Methodist Church. Interviewed by author, November 8, 2023.

[11] Darke County Commissioners, "My Darke County" https://www. mydarkecounty.com/ communities.

[12] Hood, David, *U.S., Methodist and Gordon History* (Gordon, OH: Gordon United Methodist Church, 2005) 1.

a youth pastor who began in February 2015.[13] The children and youth program flourished under this youth pastor.

In April 2015, the pastor at the nearby St. Matthew's Lutheran Church accepted a call to a church in New Mexico. Since there was a shortage of Lutheran pastors interested in a part-time position, the outgoing pastor arranged for the United Methodist pastor at Gordon to serve both churches, beginning in May 2015. This arrangement continued until June 2016 when the pastor retired and moved out of state.[14] The popular youth pastor was appointed to serve as lead pastor of Gordon UMC and St. Matthew's ELCA churches. At the Gordon Church, the new, young, lead pastor attempted to make necessary changes. He tried to implement a modern service and modify the leadership structure. He later admitted he moved too quickly for the congregation, prompting several key leaders to leave the church.[15] Because of this, the Gordon Church again struggled with attendance and sustainability.

St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church was in the village of Ithaca, Ohio. It was officially organized on August 23, 1847. The first building was a twenty-five by thirty-foot, frame house located on the southeast side of the village. The Lutheran families worshiped together as early as 1835, when a pastor or missionary was in the area.[16] The first constitution of the church was written in German and signed in 1849.

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[13] Gilmore interview.

[14] Gilmore interview.

[15] Travis Qualls, Pastor, Restoration Church, Centerville, OH, Interviewed by author, November 8, 2023.

[16] Lee Ann Laird and Carol Costello, eds., *A Narrative History: St Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church* (1989) 3.

The church grew as did the village of Ithaca. In 1860, the constitution listed 102 communicants.[17] In January 1988, St. Matthew's became a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, because of a merger of three larger Lutheran Church bodies. After the pastor of the Lutheran Church accepted the call to another state, and as stated above, the church partnered with the Gordon Church to share a pastor.

Soon after this, the Grace UMC in Ithaca fell into disarray. The lead pastor struggled with alcohol addiction and was discharged after a tumultuous Christmas Eve service in 2016.[18] The Ithaca church was in severe financial stress and could not afford a pastor, and several intentional interim pastors were appointed to specifically address these issues. In June 2017, Grace Church and Gordon Church began to explore the possibility of a merger. They worshipped together for the first time on Christmas Eve 2017 for a youth and family service. They worshipped together again on Easter Sunday 2018.[19]

Gordon UMC, Grace UMC and St. Matthew's ELCA churches became a three-point charge with a shared pastor. In June 2018, an associate pastor was appointed to assist with leadership of the three churches. They continued to hold three worship services, with the two pastors rotating worship leadership, until the Gordon congregation merged with the Grace congregation in 2019 and moved out of the Gordon building. The congregation became known as the Gordon Grace United Methodist Church. The lead and associate pastors attempted to bring together the two congregations as one church

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[17] Lee Ann Laird and Carol Costello, eds., *A Narrative History: St Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church,* 3.

[18] Staff Parish Relations Committee Interview, SonRise Church, Ithaca, OH, October 23, 2023.

[19] Gilmore interview.

family, recognizing the grief of those who left their home church building. The Gordon congregation was integrated into the existing congregation. However, nearly half the members of the Gordon congregation resented the merger and left.[20] The lead pastor implemented a new contemporary service while retaining the traditional worship. It was accepted and well attended. The contemporary worship was short-lived, however, due to the challenges of locating musicians to lead the worship.

In March 2020, as with other area churches, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the churches to close their doors and worship exclusively online for several months. When the church reopened for in-person worship, all three churches gathered in the Grace UMC building in Ithaca.[21] The associate pastor, now the only pastor, attempted to create a feeling of unity in the church despite hurt feelings and power struggles. In some ways, the pandemic helped the churches to recognize they needed each other to survive. Still, challenges remained in creating unity within the churches.

The church became known as Gordon-Grace-St. Matthew's Church. The churches worshipped and served together, while maintaining separate financial and business entities. In the first half of 2023, the Gordon church building was sold. Gordon-Grace Church merged and officially changed their name to SonRise Church.[22] This new name was voted on by members of all three congregations, with the anticipation that the three churches would one day be a federated congregation.

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[20] Qualls interview.

[21] Qualls interview.

[22] Rev. Marla Brown, telephone conversation, May 2023.

The ELCA initiated conversations around the idea of federation in 2019. However, this conversation stopped with the rising conflict in the UMC around the issue of ordination of LGBTQ+ persons. Finally, in 2023, even while the United Methodist Church was experiencing turmoil around disaffiliations, the ELCA leadership again approached the idea of federation as the SonRise Church did not intend to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church.

Eventually, the multi-denominational congregation was presented with the idea to form a federation between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Methodist Church. The full communion agreement between the ELCA and UMC, which was finalized in 2009, laid the foundation for this type of partnership. The full communion agreement was more than 25 years in development:

> U.S. Lutherans and United Methodists began official dialogue in 1977. About four years later, this first round of dialogues had produced a common statement between the denominations on the Christian sacrament of Baptism, which affirmed the validity of baptism administered in accord with Scripture in our churches. From 1985 to 1987, a second round of dialogues concluded with a common statement on the role of bishops in both church bodies. A third round of dialogues began in 2001, resulting in a proposal for Interim Eucharistic Sharing between the two churches at a 2004 meeting – the final step before the adoption of the full communion agreement by both churches.[23]

A subcommittee of the joint church council at SonRise-St. Matthew worked diligently in the early months of 2023 to develop a constitution for the federation of the ELCA and UMC in Ithaca. The pastor worked diligently to complete the writing of the constitution before her retirement in June of 2023.[24] I began working with the

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[23] "History," *ELCA.Org*, https://elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion/History.

[24] Rev. Marla Brown, telephone conversation, 2023.

constitution subcommittee in April 2023. Bishop Gregory V. Palmer appointed me to serve as the lead pastor at SonRise-St. Matthews Church effective July 1, 2023. The church constitution was finalized at the joint council meeting in July of 2023. The first of two required congregational votes to approve the constitution was held on August 6, 2023, with twenty-four votes for and one opposed. The second and final vote was held on November 13, 2023, with twenty-three votes for the federation, no votes opposed and no abstentions. Approved by both the UMC and ELCA denominations, the federation became official on December 1, 2023. On December 3, 2023, SonRise Church celebrated the first Sunday of Advent, first Sunday of the church year, and the first Sunday as a federated church – all United Methodist, all Lutheran, one body of Christ.

As indicated in the introduction of this chapter, SonRise Church is located in the village of Ithaca, Ohio. John Colville platted Ithaca in 1832 and gave it the name of "Twinsborough." Its location on an established highway and along the Ohio Electric Railway caused the community to grow rapidly.[25] However, the geographic size of the village was exceedingly small, covering approximately 0.03 square miles. According to DataUSA data, as of 2021, 107 people lived in Ithaca in forty-four households.[26] Thirty-five families called the village of Ithaca home. The racial makeup of the village was 100% white.[27]

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[25] Darke County Commissioners, "My Darke County" https://www. mydarkecounty.com/ communities.

[26] *Ithaca, OH*. Data USA. (n.d.-a). https://embed.datausa.io/profile/geo/ithaca-oh.

[27] *Ithaca, OH*. Data USA. (n.d.-a). https://embed.datausa.io/profile/geo/ithaca-oh.

Only 40% of households had children under the age of eighteen living with them.[28] Married couples made up 75% of the population.[29] Female single-parent families were 4.5%, and 20% are non-families.[30] The average household size was 3.09 and the average family size was 3.37.[31]

The median age in the village was thirty-four years. Residents under the age of eighteen comprised 27.9% of the population; 12.6% were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four; 27.2% were from ages twenty-five to forty-four; 19.9% were from forty-five to sixty-four; and 12.5% were sixty-five years of age or older.[32] The gender makeup of the village was 46.3% male and 53.7% female.[33]

Three churches were located in Ithaca, Ohio: SonRise Church, St. Matthew's Lutheran Church and an Ithaca Open Bible Church. It is important to note that while SonRise Church was located on the north end of town and St. Matthew's Lutheran was located on the south side of town, less than a half mile separates them. No other businesses exist in the village of Ithaca. Village offices were located in the home of the mayor.

Ithaca is located in southern Darke County, Ohio. Darke county is a somewhat larger county of 600 square miles. The population of Darke County was nearly 52,000

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[28] MissionInsite, "The Quickinsite Report." October 6, 2023, 7.

[29] MissionInsite, "The Quickinsite Report." October 6, 2023, 7.

[30] MissionInsite, "The Quickinsite Report." October 6, 2023, 7.

[31] MissionInsite, "The Quickinsite Report." October 6, 2023, 7.

[32] MissionInsite, "The Quickinsite Report." October 6, 2023, 7.

[33] MissionInsite, "The Quickinsite Report." October 6, 2023, 5.

persons.[34] At a glance, Ithaca appeared to be an economically depressed community with many older homes in need of repair. However, the average income of the area was $84,000.[35] This discrepancy was due to the inclusion of large corporate farms and larger family homes with acreage in the area immediately surrounding the village. The highest percentage of educational attainment in the study area was completion of high school at 52% and some college at 19%, while completion of an associate or bachelor's degree were both less than 8%.[36] This was surprising given there was a community college campus less than a fifteen-minute drive from Ithaca.

The Religious Insite report demonstrated that people in the area have basic Christian beliefs around God and Jesus. However, it also indicated the belief that participation in a church is not required for belief in Jesus or salvation. While 54% agreed that Jesus rules now and is Lord of heaven and earth, nearly 67% agreed that belief in Jesus does not require participation in a church.[37] Those actively involved in a church were less than 45%, and the incidence of that participation was one time a month or less often.[38]

The area demographics were like the demographics of the church community. The church was racially homogeneous. However, it included a wide variety of educational levels and career pathways. Approximately one third of the congregation was associated

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[34] MissionInsite, "The Quickinsite Report." October 6, 2023, 5.

[35] *Ithaca, OH*. Data USA. (n.d.-a). https://embed.datausa.io/profile/geo/ithaca-oh.

[36] MissionInsite, "The Quickinsite Report." October 6, 2023, 5.

[37] MissionInsite, "The Religiousinsite Report 2021." October 6, 2023, 7.

[38] MissionInsite, "The Religiousinsite Report 2021." October 6, 2023, 7.

with farming, one third were from the service industry and one third were working professionals, including from educational, medical, and business backgrounds.

The political leaning of the Ithaca community was evident. Signage and flags, especially during an election season, demonstrated the conservative and Republican viewpoints of the community. In Ithaca proper, residents displayed signs and flags supporting former President Donald J. Trump, supporting Palestine, and calling out the village council for corrupt behavior. The political environment at SonRise Church was congruent with this attitude.

At the time this project was conducted, SonRise Church was in a state of transition. The final vote to ratify the new church constitution and finalize the federation was on November 13, 2023, at the annual Congregational Meeting and Charge Conference. With that finalized, SonRise celebrated the first Sunday as a federated church on December 3, 2023, which included a reaffirmation of membership vows and a reception following worship.

The next steps were to develop bylaws for the church to define the organizational structure as well as the role and responsibilities of committees. Work was done to develop a mission and vision for the newly federated church.

Overall, each of these congregations, now one congregation, took immense pride in their history, and the obstacles they have overcome to be a church today. They were resilient people.

Ministry Journey

Just as SonRise Church is comprised of resilient people, I have proved my resilience as I, too, have overcome several challenges. I was raised in a family that valued both faith and education. My parents both have strong faith and took my brother and me to church every Sunday. They encouraged us to participate and serve in other church activities from an early age. My parents and my brother all have advanced degrees, so it follows that I, too, would value education and seek additional knowledge.

Not long after I was married, my then-husband and I moved to Arizona so he could attend Northern Arizona University. It was reasonable that I, too, would enroll in school, and that we would find a church home together. I returned to school to seek my master's degree in counseling with an emphasis in student personnel administration. This training not only helped me develop the basic skill set to be an effective leader in higher education administration but administration in other areas as well. I enrolled at Northern Arizona University as a part-time student and took most of my classes in the evening after working as an office administrator at a Federated Church, a position I began in April of 1990. Flagstaff Federated Community Church is the oldest protestant church in Flagstaff and celebrated its bicentennial while I served there. In addition to my job as the office administrator, my husband and I united with the church and became involved in a variety of ministries.

Throughout its history, the Flagstaff Federated Church included a variety of denominations. While I worked there, it was a federated church of the United Methodist and Presbyterian (USA) denominations. Rev. Dr. Reford Nash was the lead pastor and was ordained in the Presbyterian tradition. He was academic, progressive, and outwardly

focused. Federated Church was home to several ordained clergy who also worked at the university, so Dr. Nash confided in me that it challenged him to stay academic in his messages. I learned from Dr. Nash about church administration, worship development, building partnerships and serving the community.

During this time, I became pregnant with twins. This was a big shock to my husband and me. While we had planned to start a family, it was about two years earlier than we expected. My husband began working full-time as a security guard while attending school part-time with the expectation that our expenses would increase markedly. During the pregnancy, I was prescribed bedrest and forced to resign my position at the church.

When our twin girls were born, they were pre-term. They spent additional time in the hospital under the watchful eyes of medical staff until they developed enough to come home. Their combined hospital bills were nearly $100,000. Suddenly, life decisions became more practical.

Four months later, I received a call from Dr. Nash asking me to consider returning to work at Federated Church. I returned both to work and to my education while raising a family. My return to work was divine intervention. Dr. Nash became my mentor and later guided me into ordained ministry. My responsibility increased in church administrative leadership as he came to rely on me to take care of things when he was away.

While working at Federated Church, the executive presbyter of the Presbyterian Church invited me to an information session about seminary. While I was interested, the timing was not right for our family.

I soon realized that childcare costs were more than we could afford, so I obtained a better paying position at Coconino Community College in Flagstaff. Coconino Community College was a newly formed county community college initiated by a bond issue on the county ballot. I fully supported the establishment of a college in Coconino County and lobbied the community to support the effort. My jobs at the community college included working as a registration clerk, proceeding to a credential's evaluator, then an admissions counselor and academic advisor. I traveled around the service district, including trips to the Navajo and Hopi reservations, to recruit students and talk about educational opportunities in the area.

After graduation, I searched for a director position in higher education. A year later, my family and I moved to Ohio, where I obtained a position at Edison State Community College. We moved to Ohio in March 1998, just as our twin girls turned five years old. We did all the right things to connect with the community. We looked for a home to purchase, a church to attend, and for new activities to get connected in the community.

After visiting several churches, Troy First United Methodist Church in Troy, Ohio, became our church home. We enjoyed the worship service; it felt comfortable and familiar to us. We also enjoyed the message of Rev. Ron Payne. He was in his sixties and very energetic and his sermon development was clearly academic and insightful.

Six months later, we settled into our new home; the twins enrolled in kindergarten; my husband finally found a job; and I was doing well at my job. Life fell into place. I joined the church choir and a small prayer and praise group. God often spoke

to me through the words and music as it fills the church. I am at peace when the church sanctuary is filled with music.

My then-husband struggled with the transition to Ohio, and our marriage suffered an was soon terminated. Although I felt as though my world was falling apart, I also knew I had to move on and prepare myself for the increased expenses of raising children alone and aligning myself for success. I began to explore online doctoral programs in Higher Education. I started this the same way anyone would in the 21st century. I searched Google for educational opportunities. The first entry was United Theological Seminary (United). United did not meet any of the criteria I entered, but there it was. I clicked on the link to see what it was all about, made a campus visit, and enrolled. Clearly God was still calling me into ministry after all these years. Attending seminary part time while working full time and being a single parent was a challenge and, somehow, my daughters and I did it. We illustrated the definition of resilience.

I continued to work at Edison State and was promoted to the position of dean of student success. That role required me to serve on several special projects. One was the implementation of a new administrative software program. This software not only included the student side of registration, financial aid, billing, and degree-audit, but also included the human resources and accounting packages. I served as part of the implementation team and was team lead on designing and programming the degree-audit portion, which is still in use twenty-three years later. Another project established a new vision for the college, aligning them for the 21st century. As part of that team, I developed questions and hosted visioning sessions with students, staff, faculty, and community

members. The data collected was used to form a new vision and strategic plan for the college.

As the twins attended junior and senior high school, they always enjoyed worship and being involved in church activities. So, during their church activities, I would sit in the sanctuary for prayer and study. My time in the sanctuary was the only time of the week that I was alone with my thoughts. I experienced a feeling of peace and gained energy to make it through the rest of the week. The added stress of working fulltime while attending seminary and raising teenagers was challenging, but we all survived because of our strong faith in God.

Parenting is the hardest thing I ever loved and still is. My children were and are the greatest thing I have ever done. This was put to the test in 2010, when a widowed faculty member and I began spending time together. He taught me how to play racquetball, pickleball, and golf. The twins were not thrilled with this. He served as a pastor in a Freewill Baptist Church, but he eventually stepped down due to his teaching schedule. We would text often, sharing the weekly scripture text and message from that morning. We were married in 2011, the day after the twins graduated from high school. The twins came around to love Steve.

Transitioning to the life of an empty nester would have been difficult had I not been a newlywed. I relearned how to share my life with someone else, while adjusting to my daughters being away. Steve and I have grown together in life and ministry. We are friends and partners in ministry and life. We like to work and play hard. We make each other better. This is what God intended for marriage partners.

My summer sabbath time is spent with Steve. We enjoy playing golf, camping, fishing, and bike riding. Spending time outside enjoying God's natural world has reignited my love of nature. The beauty of the natural surroundings remind me of the power of God around us. My weekly sabbath time is spent in a pottery studio. I am a ceramic artist, creating both hand-built and wheel-thrown creations. While pottery is an art, there is a definite order to the process. This activity keeps me centered and creative, and reminds me that, like pottery, I am a work in progress. The fires that we face truly make us stronger.

I served as a bi-vocational pastor for the first two years of our marriage. Then, I was appointed to a rural two-point charge. I tried to maintain my bi-vocational work status but did not feel like it was fair to either call. I resigned from the college to focus on ministry full-time. This was a scary step as my salary was reduced by 60%. However, my trust in God reassured me that everything would work out. It turned out to be the best decision for both my physical and mental health as my stress level decreased immensely. Serving in a church has proved rewarding. I have made time to stop and listen for what God is calling me to do, as well as how God wants me to move the congregations forward in faith. To this day, I find myself sitting in the sanctuary chatting with God and more importantly, listening to God for direction and inspiration.

In my first appointment, I learned to listen to God more and how to navigate the internal politics of the family church. It was particularly challenging to navigate the family church as I wanted to jump in to provide opportunities for followers to experience God. Each time I tried to impose my will on the congregation, God said, "Wait." Slow

change and waiting on God became my understanding of the rural family church. My biggest take-away from that appointment was the power of prayer.

My second appointment was in an historic suburban church of about 100 worshippers that was still thinking and operating like a church of 500. I remembered the lesson learned from my first appointment and relied on prayer more. I encouraged the congregation to pray regularly, and to rely on prayer as their first action for any decisions. In my quiet times, I experienced several message or visions from God, all of which included a new building to reach the youth of the community. This church humored my ideas and they played along, saying, “Let’s give it a try, once.” However, internal conflict arose when the trustees proposed the demolition of a historic building on the property. This incited an emotional response from the community who posted negative comments on social media. There was no lasting impact on the church or congregation. The building was removed, and the community moved on to other issues. My calm response to the conflict and detailed response to the bishop about the complaints led to a new appointment increasing responsibility and additional remuneration.

My appointment to SonRise followed. I quickly saw a need to refocus the congregation on prayer, unity, and discipleship. In a recent training, I was required to take the Working Genius Assessment. My score was an E and T. E is enablement. This involved answering the call to action and seamlessly providing others with the unconditional support and assistance they needed. T is Tenacity. This is about execution. It involved getting things done, achieving results, and realizing the desired impact of a task or project. These results are congruent with the joy I felt when I cross things off my “to do” list.

According to the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, I was an ISFJ, one of the sixteen personality types identified in this assessment based on the theories of psychoanalyst Carl Jung. ISFJ stands for introvert, sensing, feeling, and judging. People who have ISFJ personalities were known for being warm-hearted, responsible, and reserved. That truly described me.

The results from these two assessments aligned with one another, and with my own values of loyalty, integrity, commitment, determination, and devotion. I have a strong background in administration, and these assessments reflected it. Ultimately, my sense of God was joy. I strived to share the joy of the Lord with those I met each day.

These two assessments, by default, also identified growing edges. According to Working Genius, my growing areas, or areas needed from someone else when serving on a team, were wonder and invention. Wonder was finding joy in identifying the need for improvement or change. Invention meant that one easily confirms the importance of a need and generated an idea for a solution. As I reflected on these two areas, I believed that I had these abilities. However, I did not find joy in them. Creating change, specially making changes for the sake of change did not fit my personality. The Myers Briggs showed that I scored low on the perceiving and intuition areas. These were skills that I needed to develop, explore, and wait on God for insight and ideas.

In previous professional positions, I had been called to be an agent of change and had done so efficiently and successfully. However, I did not enjoy the process. Change was hard to manage and could be especially difficult in a homogeneous group that was not used to innovative ideas. God gave me the gift of tenacity. Fortitude, while different

from tenacity, was also a good descriptor for my gifts. Tenacity kept me forward thinking and forward moving in challenging times.

Developing Synergy

My interaction and conversations with the members of SonRise Church during the first few months of ministry with them led me to the observation that the people of SonRise Church were struggling to develop a sense of unity. A church federation, much like a church merger, was like a marriage between two people. Two independent churches came together under a unifying covenant. For it "to be successful, both congregations need to form new traditions together and to be able to let go of long-time practices and the old ways of doing church."[39] Though the union is ultimately spiritual, there are still organizational issues the church needed to address.

Even though the merger and federation of SonRise Church was in process for several years, the church members still identified themselves by their previous congregations. A member introduced themselves by their name, adding, "I am a "Grace Methodist," a "Gordon Methodist" or a "St. Matt's Lutheran." Celebrating the first day as a new congregation and including a reaffirmation of our membership vows as part of the worship service was done to help people refocus their membership connection to the SonRise Church.

There was still some resentment and residual grief from the Lutheran church family about selling a building that they described as "looking like a church" and being

[39] Craig Walls, "What is the key to a successful church merger?" *Disciples Church Extension Fund,* August 4, 2020, https://disciplescef.org/blog/what-key-successful-church-merger.

forced to move to a more modern building. From the Grace Methodist family, there was an underlying feeling their building and worship was being "taken over" by the Lutheran liturgy and furniture. This feeling was exacerbated by the removal of all items with the United Methodist cross and flame from the sanctuary when the churches began worshipping together. To assist in the alleviation of that grief experienced by the former members of St. Matthew's Lutheran, a deconsecration service for the historic church building was completed. Additionally, a new church sign and other items included the new SonRise Church logo. The primary symbolism of the new logo was a sunrise with the cross of Christ.

I also observed misunderstandings around the differences between the theologies of the Methodist and Lutheran ideologies. Misunderstanding was creating a rift among church members. There were differences in worship styles, governance, stewardship, budgeting, the role of the pastor, and social principals that needed to be navigated. As pastor, I led a transitional leadership team to develop guidelines around these areas that helped to alleviate the misunderstandings and respect the polity of each denomination. The new constitution defined these for SonRise Church as they were developed in a way to honor the denominational requirements, while defining SonRise as a new church.

Rev. Dr. Craig Walls states that one of the "biggest mistakes merging churches make is not fully accepting that two churches coming together are truly making something new. A merged church is not a continuation of the old congregations. It is the opportunity for the Holy Spirit to start afresh."[40] In response to that, SonRise church has a new name and new logo. Through this project a new mission and vision created by the

[40] Craig Walls, "What is the key to a successful church merger?"

members of the congregation emerged. All congregational leaders were invited to attend a series of learning and guided brainstorming sessions to develop a new mission and vision for the new church. The sessions focused on shared understanding and commitment to action. This approach was represented by the SOAR acronym which stands for Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results.[41] This SOAR process focused on strengths and sought to address the system as a whole and invited all relevant stakeholders into the process. The intent for the church was to become unified under one common mission and vision.

There were three general steps to creating and implementing mission and vision statements: (1) developing a congregational identity; (2) developing a congregational mission; and (3) moving from mission to action. Developing a congregational identity included brainstorming exercises with the project team to arrive at a common understanding of who the church was. It also included a presentation about the individual merging churches, their local church histories and a comparison of denominational beliefs. Developing a congregational identity included a similar brainstorming process to determine what the church wanted to be. Finally, moving from mission to action included finalizing the mission and vision statements, unveiling these statements to the congregation, ensuring the statements were in line with the church's new constitution and publishing them so that they would stay visible to the congregation. The following is a brief outline of the sessions and modules.

Week 1 -

- Explanation of project and agreements to participate
- Verify completion of the Informed Consent Form

[41] Stavros, Jacqueline M., and Gina Hinrichs. *The thin book of soar: Building strengths-based strategy* (Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing, 2009), 3.

- Administer pre-project questionnaire
- Presentation of the history of the local churches
- Development of timeline activity
- Brainstorming practicing activity

Week 2 -

- Presentation of Biblical Foundation of Ephesians 4:1-16
- Discussion of Biblical Foundation
- Brainstorming "Who Are We" Questions

Week 3 –

- Presentation of Theological Foundation of the Priesthood of all Believers
- Discussion of Theological Foundation
- Review of the Full-Communion Agreement between the ELCA and UMC
- Brainstorming "Who Is Our Neighbor" and "How can we better serve God?" questions

Week 4 -

- Presentation of Historical Foundation of Count Zinzendorf
- Discussion of Historical Foundation
- Brainstorm "How are we different from other churches?" "Who do we want to be?" and "How do we want to be known?" questions

Week 5 -

- Presentation on the Interdisciplinary Foundation of developing mission and vision statements for business
- Discussion on the Interdisciplinary Foundation
- Presentation of Core Values of the ELCA and UMC
- Brainstorming core values
- Brainstorming aspirations
- Brainstorming on what do we need to reach our goals?

Week 6 –

- Sharing of potential mission and vision statements, wordsmithing and selection of final mission and vision statements
- Selection of core values of the church
- Selection of the theme scripture verse to support mission and vision of church
- Brainstorming on theme final presentation of the mission statement, vision statement, and core values for the church
- Final presentation of the theme scripture verse of the church
- Planning of unveiling celebration for the full congregation
- Administer post-project questionnaire

The project took place in August and September 2025 and included six workshops that explored foundational information and focused brainstorming exercises. The participants included key leaders from the church leadership team and pastor parish relations committee.

One former pastor shared that a challenge of rural ministry is that there is little continuity from one pastor to the next.[42] Each pastor has their own ideas about how to grow, move forward and focus energy. It was my goal to unify the congregation through systematic mission and vision development, teamwork and education while leaving room for the Holy Spirit to work in and through the members of the congregation. Through this common work we grew and developed together as one church family to shine God's love to the world.

Conclusion

This introduction to the context for this project and brief outline of the work that was included in the project explained how the problem statement for the project was identified, and the hypothesis was developed. This chapter outlined a general plan of implementation for the project. The general objective of the project was to assist the leadership of SonRise Church to develop a mission and vision for the church to help move it forward in ministry together as a new church.

As noted previously, the problem was that the congregation lacked a unified mission and vision to direct them forward in ministry. The hypothesis was if the congregation developed a common mission and vision, an increased sense of community

[42] John Gilmore interview, 2024.

would develop within the congregation. The desired result was that the congregation would be aligned for long term ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Teamwork, loosely defined, involves working together to achieve something beyond the capabilities of individuals. It requires working together toward a common vision. Football provides a fitting example of teamwork. When players meet for the first time, they are not a team. They are simply a group of individuals theoretically working toward a common vision or goal. After working and playing together it is a sense of unity and purpose that makes them a team. A common mission directs them to move forward together. The writer of the letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians) had a similar sense of unity and purpose in mind for the followers at Ephesus. The desire was to unite them under one mission so that they might experience a sense of unity.

Christian unity, as described in Ephesians 4:1-16, provided a Biblical basis for the development of common mission and visions statements at SonRise Church. Christian unity moved them forward together as a unified church body. This chapter begins with an introduction to the Ephesians, provides a critical explanation and interpretation of Ephesians 4:1-16 and outlines the implications for this project.

Introduction to the letter to the Ephesians

Paul was once considered the author of the letter to the Ephesians. Those who read the first few words, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus"[1] might have initially understood this to be true. Ephesians also used first person singular tense, which supported the claim that it was written by Paul. The text of Ephesians included self-defining terms, such as "prisoner of Christ Jesus,"[2] "prisoner in the Lord,"[3] and "ambassador in chains."[4] All of these referred to the real-life experiences of Paul as he was imprisoned for his beliefs about Jesus Christ. Ephesians used a literary structure like other Pauline letters; that structure was salutation, thanksgiving, doctrinal exposition, moral appeal, final words, and benediction. Finally, the theology was like Pauline doctrine of the church as seen in other letters. All these things contributed to the hypothesis that the letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul.

However, debate has continued over the authorship of Ephesians. The practice of writing letters in the name of an influential person was reasonably common in the ancient Greco-Roman world.[5] Some argued that Ephesians was commissioned by Paul and written by a follower of Paul, perhaps even Tychicus who is mentioned toward the end of the letter.[6] It was possible a follower of Paul wrote it several years later. In the case of

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[1] Ephesians 1:1.

[2] Ephesians 3:1.

[3] Ephesians 4:1.

[4] Ephesians 6:20.

[5] Frank Thielman, *Ephesians-Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 1.

[6] Ephesians 6:21.

Ephesians, if indeed it was forged, due to the content, it appeared that the letter was for the purpose of encouragement rather than to deceive. Since the content of Ephesians strongly relied on the other Pauline letters, this indicated that the author was not Paul but someone who freely appropriated the material.[7] While Ephesians had a similar structure to the other letters written by Paul, it lacked the personal experience greeting. The type of greeting that Paul used usually included details of the relationship between Paul and the church to which he was writing.[8] In this letter those elements were missing. While I found the arguments on authorship compelling, it probably does not matter who wrote it. The authorship of the letter did not affect the biblical interpretation or applicability to this project. Therefore, for clarity, I referred to the author of the letter to the Ephesians as Paul, as this was the name the author chose for himself in the opening.

Paul wrote this letter "To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus".[9] Ephesus was a prominent ancient city on the coast of Asia Minor, which is now part of modern-day Turkey, near the Aegean Sea.[10] It was one of the largest and most important cities in the Roman Empire. Because of its location, Ephesus was a center for international trade, finance, and communication. Paul ministered to the people of Ephesus

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[7] Frank E Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible. Vol 11; Ephesians-Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 5.

[8] J. Paul Samply, Richard Hayes, Judith Gundry-Volf, Morna D. Hooker, and Andrew T. Lincoln, *The New Interpreter's Bible. Volume XI, the Second Letter to the Corinthians, the Letter to the Galatians, the Letter to the Ephesians, the Letter to the Philippians, the Letter to the Colossians, the First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians, the First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus, the Letter to Philemon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 351.

[9] Ephesians 1:1.

[10] Tremper Longman, Iii, ed. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), Accessed March 16, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=4447072. 758.

for about three years.[11] Interpretations of this gospel found that Paul's departure from Ephesians was emotional, so it makes sense that he developed deep relationships with the people at Ephesus.[12]

Paul lived in Ephesus, around 52-54 C.E. where he successfully planted a Christian community.[13] It is hypothesized that Paul wrote to the Ephesians while imprisoned in Rome from 62-64 C.E.[14] These dates also allowed for Paul's other missionary journeys that took place between his time in Ephesus and Rome. As indicated at the end of the letter, Tychicus was commissioned to deliver the letter to the Ephesians. This is the same time that he delivered other letters on behalf of Paul.[15]

The letter to the Ephesians was written in an ornate rhetorical structure. It was like other letters written by Paul, which included both religious doctrine and application. However, "Ephesians has a number of very long sentences, often containing subordinate clauses"[16] and utilizes more than seventy words that are not common to Paul's other writings.[17] That made it appear more like a carefully planned essay than a letter. The mood was more contemplative than most of Paul's other letters, which may have resulted from his long imprisonment in Rome. Ephesians contained six chapters. The first half,

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[11] Acts 20:31.

[12] Acts 20:37.

[13] Thielman, *Ephesians- Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament,* 16.

[14] Gaebelein, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 16.

[15] Gaebelein, The Expositors Bible Commentary, 16.

[16] Stephen E. Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), 21.

[17] Deborah Barackman and Gary Wilde, *Ephesians: Life in the Church* (Elgin, Il: DC Cook Pub. Co, 1986), 9.

chapters one through three, included doctrinal teaching; the second half, chapters four through six, included application of the teachings to Christian life.

Many of Paul's letters were written to address misunderstandings in the church or to warn against false teachings. Paul's letter to the Ephesians was different. It was more visionary as it reflected upon God's desire for the church and plan for God's world. Its purpose was to expound on the blessings enjoyed by the church, to stress the unity of the body of Christ, and to encourage believers in the ways of Christ. The first three chapters of the letter focused on followers standing in Christ. The last three chapters focused on principles of Christian living applying the principles outlined.

As conventional religious thought declined in the first century, it left room for a variety of pagan religious groups to offer deliverance from evil and a search for unity. An interest in building unity among the people began to grow.[18] Paul taught that this search for unity could be found in Christ. While Paul may have had unity among the Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians from Ephesus in mind when he wrote this letter, Gaebelein, in the Expositors Bible Commentary, claimed that there was little evidence to support any type of conflict between the two groups.[19] Further research as summarized by New Testament scholar, Jody Barnard has concluded that there was some basis to this conflict between the Gentile and Jewish Christians.[20]

> The unity that the author is so keen to promote seems to be directed toward a particular manifestation of disunity, namely, that between Jew and Gentile. Thus, although the theme of unity is relevant for the promotion of unity in general, the issue in Ephesians is more specific. Several commentators have attempted to account for this aspect of the

[18] Gaebelein, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 14.

[19] Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary,* 29.

[20] Jody A. Barnard, "Unity in Christ: The Purpose of Ephesians." *The Expository Times* 120, no.4 (2009): 169. doi:10.1177/0014524608099799.

> letter, and have argued that the purpose of Ephesians is to correct Gentile delusions of superiority over Jewish believers. Ephesians was written to address Gentiles who were boasting of their supposed independence of Israel and were becoming intolerant of their Jewish Christian brethren.[21]

The world today is often indifferent to Christianity; therefore, it is a good reminder that we are to live in a manner worthy of our calling so that we might be witnesses to the world of God's love. Ephesians did that. In a world that is often self-promoting, Ephesians called followers to lead with love instead. Today's Christians may find that "Ephesians is above all a hymn of unity. Paul's conception of oneness in Christ extends beyond the church to include all creation. God's ultimate purpose is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."[22] We are called to be one body.

Exploring Ephesians 4:1-16

The biblical foundation for this project focused on Ephesians 4:1-16, the first half of chapter four. Chapter four began the second half of the letter which included practical application of the doctrine to Christian life. This section outlined a basic ideal needed for the achievement of Christian unity. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to be a part of this unity, which was required to be a spiritually effective church. Three themes were found in this section of Ephesians. They are the centrality of Christ, the unity of the church, and the ongoing sanctification of believers. In verses one through six, Paul encouraged the Ephesians to remain unified as one body in Christ. In verses seven through thirteen, Paul

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[21] Barnard, "Unity in Christ: The Purpose of Ephesians," 169.

[22] Gaebelein, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 14.

outlined the God-given gifts the Ephesians already received that produced Christian unity. Finally, in verses fourteen to sixteen, Paul illustrated that mature love was the goal and could be achieved through Christian unity.

Chapter four opened with an appeal to live in a way that expresses a new creation in unity. In verses1-6, Paul urged the Ephesians to live in a way that was worthy of the calling they had received. He encouraged them by writing:

> [1]As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. **2** Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. **3** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.[23]

These words of encouragement were common to Paul's writings. He said that followers of Christ must, "live a life worthy of the calling you have received."[24] According to Paul, this meant to live a life that is humble, gentle, patient, and loving.

Paul was so impressed by God's call on his heart, that he not only encouraged the people of Ephesus but urged them to live up to the ideal of a life worthy of the calling.[25] This calling was based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. David Garland explains that "the word 'worthy' was at one time used to mean to bring up the other beam of the scales in equilibrium, to put things in proper balance."[26] In this case, the actions of

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[23] Ephesians 4:1-6.

[24] Ephesians 4:1.

[25] Deborah Barackman, and Gary Wilde, *Ephesians: Life in the Church*, 63.

[26] David E. Garland, "A Life Worthy of the Calling: Unity and Holiness Ephesians 4:1 - 24." *Review & Expositor* 76, no. 4 (December 1979), 517. https://doi.org/10.1177/003463737907600407.

Christians should have balanced the action of God. In Ephesians, Paul addressed how disunity affected the balance in their lives.

Garland highlighted how faith communities were affected by the juxtaposition between internal disputes and teachings of reconciliation.[27] Paul encouraged followers to maintain the "unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace," noting that followers were bound by one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. Converted Jews and Gentiles had conflicting views of Christianity.

Paul's appeal was to live in a way that expressed a new creation in unity. This new life of unity required a new attitude, one that promoted unity. This unity that Paul called for was not uniformity; rather it was a call to a common purpose that stemmed from unity in our common belief in Christ as Lord and Savior. This unity included respect and appreciation for the differences in beliefs, lifestyle, and theology. It looked to common understandings that led to mature faith in Christ. This type of worthy life attitude was characterized by humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love. True humility simply recognized that humans were creatures made by God, and dependent upon God. They were also dependent on one another and served one another as Jesus taught. Gentleness was characterized by their willingness to accept who they were in Christ and to be receptive to God's call on their lives. Being patient led to a greater appreciation of each other and a tolerance for other viewpoints. As they bore with one another in love, they showed concern for another's well-being, accepting

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[27] Garland, A Life Worthy of the Calling: Unity and Holiness Ephesians 4:1 -24." *Review & Expositor,* 517.

their shortcomings as well as the shortcomings of others. All of this showed an acceptance of, and respect for, their differences, but they were not necessarily a common agreement.

Paul stressed that believers should "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."[28] While this bond of peace might have created or enhanced the Christian community, it went beyond living together in peace. The oneness or unity of the body was through the power of the Holy Spirit. The church was unified by the Holy Spirit of God and what God did among the people. Unity was not attained through human work, grit, or simple tolerance of differences. There was a diversity in unity. The bond of peace unified and held together the community; and it was maintained through love for God and a love for one another.[29]

Peace in this case was not just a feeling; rather it was something created by Christ that bound the Church in unity. The foundation for that unity rested in the common beliefs of the community. In verse four, Paul highlighted seven common beliefs in which the believers remained unified. These seven common beliefs included one body, one Spirit, one hope, one faith, one Lord, one baptism, One God and Father who is God of all. Believers were all connected by the one Spirit; all possessed one hope; and all confessed one Lord so that all had one faith in the one God.

The one body was the church in a single visible community. Romans 12:5 says that "in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the

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[28] Ephesians 4:3.

[29] James Sedlacek, An Exegesis of Ephesians 4:1-6 and 4:14-16: Connecting Christian Unity to Christian Maturity (January 2014), 5. https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.4828.5442.

others." The importance of one body was to understand that while all were different, with different gifts, all were one body of Christ. The one Spirit was the Holy Spirit, who gave all access to God. I Corinthians 12:13 says, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." The one hope was that all had the common hope of salvation in Jesus Christ. Romans 8:23-25 explained:

> **23** And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. **24** We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? **25** But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.[30]

As believers "wait to be adopted…we were saved in hope." The hope was in Jesus Christ. The one faith was also in Christ, central to which was Christ's death and resurrection. Hebrews 12:2 said that believers were to, "fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God's throne."[31] So it followed that Jesus is the one Lord, the master over all life. First Corinthians 8:6 explained that "there is one Lord Jesus Christ. All things exist through him, and we live through him."[32]

The one baptism was the external seal of incorporation into the body of Christ. Galatians 3:27 explained it by saying, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." There was one God, the Father who was over all and

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[30] Romans 8:23-25.

[31] Hebrews 12:2.

[32] Corinthians 8:6.

through all and in all.[33] First Corinthians 8:6 explained "There is one God the Father. All things come from him, and we belong to him."

These seven common beliefs were based on the concept of Trinity. The Holy Spirit who advocates on behalf of each believer and dwells in each believer. Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, whose death and resurrection was the basis for our faith. God, the creator who unified believers because God was over all, and through all, and in all.[34]

The idea of finding common belief in the common ideals of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one faith, one Lord, one baptism, One God and Father of all was utilized to create unity in the body of Christ rather than to oppose the challenge of religious pluralism. The Ephesians knew there was only one true people of God. The true people of God included all those who were part of the body of Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles. Those outside the body of Christ, those not versed in the seven common beliefs, were not included in the gift of salvation. These generalities allowed for an appearance of unity for the Ephesians. The unity which Paul called for was not uniformity; it was a call to a common purpose that stemmed from unity in our common belief in Christ as Lord and Savior. This unity included respect and appreciation for the differences in beliefs, lifestyle, and theology. It looked to common understandings that led to mature faith in Christ. Maturity of faith was a result of a sense of unity within the community of faith.

Verses seven through fourteen of chapter four address the gifts given by the Holy Spirit that produced a sense of unity. The Holy Spirit gave all followers a gift that

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[33] Galatians 3:27.

[34] Deborah Barackman, and Gary Wilde, *Ephesians: Life in the Church*, 66.

enabled them to contribute to the community in a unique way and helped them to grow in their faith. The various roles listed by Paul were to be utilized in service to the body of Christ, the Church.

In Ephesians 4:7-14, Paul outlined the gifts that God gave people to do God's work here on earth.

> **7** But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. **8** This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." **9** (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? **10** He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) **11** So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **12** to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.[35]

Through these gifts, God equipped believers to walk in unity as one body. These gifts were given to all Christians; Paul indicated that God provided all that was needed to respond to God's call. Each follower of Christ had individual gifts, and were required to utilize those gifts, together, to build up the kingdom of God and be of service to the body of Christ, the Church. These gifts served to help those in the roles of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. All these gifts together were given by Christ to benefit the unity among the Christians at Ephesus. They were given to the church as a whole to guide it in faith, knowledge, and truth. Because of God's grace, each one fulfilled his or her roles as members of Christ's body, the church.[36] All these gifts were given so that church members may serve in Christ's name. Each person's gift is to be

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[35] Ephesians 4:7-14.

[36] Deborah Barackman, and Gary Wilde, *Ephesians: Life in the Church*, 67.

used to contribute to the body as a whole. Each was equally important to the body. There was no comparison, nor was there one more important than another. When all participated and made use of their gifts, the body would "all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."[37] This maturity applied to both the individual as well as the collective members of the body of Christ.[38]

In Ephesians 4:14-16, Paul explained how God intended the church to function.

> **14** Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. **15** Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. **16** From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows, and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.[39]

The gifts that Christ gave the church involved all Christians. A new, young, or immature church may be susceptible to heretical doctrines that could have drawn attention away from the call God gave them and created division among the people. Proper use of these gifts inhibited the challenges faced due to immaturity of faith, indecisiveness, and being deceived by false teachings. The gifts assisted followers to stay focused on the mission of the church. As a result of Christ providing these gifts, Christians grew in faith through love for one another. Therefore, through Christ, the church was built up through

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[37] Ephesians 4:13.

[38] Samply, J. Paul, Richard Hayes, Judith Gundry-Volf, Morna D. Hooker, and Andrew T. Lincoln, *The New Interpreter's Bible. Volume XI, the Second Letter to the Corinthians, the Letter to the Galatians, the Letter to the Ephesians, the Letter to the Philippians, the Letter to the Colossians, the First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians, the First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus, the Letter to Philemon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 422.

[39] Ephesians 4:14-16.

cooperating in unity with one another. Further, the church was built up by love for one another.

In verse fifteen, Paul encouraged the believers to speak the truth in love. He did so in response to the many false teachings surrounding the early church. Believers were warned to remain faithful to the truth taught to them. The first defense against spiritual attack was truth. Truth was the primary defense against false teachings. Followers were to speak the truth to help others and to do so gently. To speak the truth in love was to encourage growth in Christ, the head of the church, and it resulted in greater conformity to Christ. I have experienced people who claimed to speak the truth in love while they utilized that phrase as a free ticket to criticize or to point out the sins or unethical behavior of another. This was not consistent with Paul's meaning. Paul intended to speak the truth in love to build up another person, and to develop faith. It was not to put down others or to elevate the illusion of superiority over another. That was what Paul was writing against.

While it was clear in this pericope that the church was still growing, the mission of the church was beginning to come together. The maturing of the church was not an individual goal but a communal ambition with Christ as the head of the body. Christ was the source of the body's structure and support. The entire body received its direction from Christ and each member contributed so that the body functioned properly. It was only when each part was working properly that the body received the support it needed to thrive. The stronger each member of the congregation, the stronger the church. No matter how insignificant any member of the body may have seemed, each person had a real contribution to make. Individuality combined to strengthen the whole so that the body

was built up in love. “Paul teaches that growth takes place through difference, not sameness. No two parts do the same thing. Love is what holds the body together. This love grows as individual members do the work to which they are called.”[40]

While the letter to the Ephesians was written to the church in Ephesus it was also a letter to the church of today. The unity of the Spirit did not imply a specific organizational structure or denominational unity. Rather, it encouraged mutual acceptance and recognition of fellow believers, regardless of the denomination to which they subscribed. Paul began this pericope with the encouragement to the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of their calling. He then discussed several habits and practices that were essential to walking in this worthy manner. The development of these practices was necessary for the community to live together in unity and walk in a manner worthy of their calling. This meant that the community was to maintain the unity of the body of Christ through the development of the gifts given to the Church by Christ through the Holy Spirit.[41] Clearly Christ through the Holy Spirit not only created the unity of the church but maintained it as well. In the world and in the federated church community there were doctrinal issues with conflicting views, and there were faithful people who were undecided on some of these issues. It was encouraging, though, that there was greater acceptance and recognition of each other. Perhaps Ephesians four is a measure of

[40] Deborah Barackman, and Gary Wilde, *Ephesians: Life in the Church*, 74.

[41] Stephen E. Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary,* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), 144.

conduct between churches and traditions to outline how believers could have viewed and treated one another.[42]

The meaning behind the letter to the Ephesians will continue to be explored for years to come. Today, "We may confidently affirm that Ephesians was written to promote unity…to affirm the supremacy of Christ over every power, and to remind believers of their privileges in Christ."[43]

Summary

In Romans, Paul used the image of the one body and many members to encourage the local church to consider each other as one body in Christ. An argument can be made to demonstrate that the author of Ephesians had a broader focus, one that addressed a worldwide unity of the church.[44] The Letter to the Ephesians asserted that the unity of the church was not based in homogeneity, or uniformity, but rather it was a unity in diversity. This was observed in the local church congregation, denominations, and even ecumenical groups. It overcame barriers of doctrine and practice, race and ethnicity, culture and nationality, economic and educational status.[45] This unity was based on a common understanding of seven factors including: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Spirit,

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[30]Frederick J. de Beer, The Ecclesiastical Difficulty of Ephesians 4:1–6 in View of the Different Perspectives on the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit." *In Die Skriflig / in Luce Verbi* 54, no. 1 (October 2020), 7. https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v54i1.2641.

[43] Barnard, "Unity in Christ: The Purpose of Ephesians," 171. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0014524608099799.

[44] Ulrich Heckel, "The Seven Marks of the Unity of the Church." *The Ecumenical Review* 73, no. 4 (October 2021), 756. https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12638.

[45] Isom E. Ballenger, Ephesians 4:1–16, *Interpretation*, 51 no. 3 (1997): 294. https://doi.org/10.1177/002096439605100309.

one hope, one body, and one God and father of us all. The diversity remained, but it was integrated into one spirit. Everyone brought to the body a diversity of individual gifts reconciled under a common purpose. The unity was established through the peace of Christ in a community of reconciliation.[46]

While the unity that Paul addressed in this letter most likely focused on unity of the Jewish Christians with the Gentile Christians, it could also be applied to denominational differences and beyond. In the case of SonRise Church, the goal for unity was with two long-standing churches that stem from two different historically reformational denominations, the United Methodist Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The exhortation of Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians "to bear together in love" may have helped to address the need for unity in newly federated or merged congregations.

The life of the church in the world is interwoven with the life of the local church. I would contend that the local church may be a microcosm of the church in the world, where it is called to love God and others, celebrate word and sacrament, and transform people both individually and communally. The church is called to serve. "By serving…the church fulfills its task to bear witness to God's reconciliation, healing, and transformation. God's call to unity goes hand in hand with God's call to serve and communicate the gospel in word and deed. God calls the churches to strive for unity."[47] SonRise Church, and its predecessors had a long history of service to the community, that

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[46] Heckel, "The Seven Marks of the Unity of the Church," 756.

[47] Stéphanie Dietrich, "God's Mission as a Call for Transforming Unity." *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 2 (December 2018), 390. https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12237.

included serving in several local ministries, such as soup kitchens and food banks, group foster homes, partnering with local churches, participating in community activities, and supporting international mission work.

As SonRise Church developed new mission and vision statements at the grassroots level, it was their goal to become a more cohesive team so that they could work together in unity to build up the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. There was no expectation that the membership would reach perfection or that the church would be an ideal community. It was a process to be entered into and engaged in so that the community would grow in faith and mature in their relationship with Christ. Richard Ward writes that, "unity is not just something Christians passively accept or reject, it is something we choose to do."[48] The work of unity required a great deal of effort for all those involved. I proposed that a common goal would help to develop unity within the local congregation. In turn, the unity within the church would contribute to maturity in Christ. Reaching maturity in Christ was a process that "has to do with life and growth, being the body of Christ in place and time, in changing places and changing times."[49] This could only be accomplished through ears that were open to God's word, and hearts that were open to God's transformation. This project helped the participants to focus on the mission and vision of SonRise Church to move the church forward in unity to align their congregation for long term ministry.

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[48] David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word: Year A,* Volume 3. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 307.

[49] Isom E. Ballenger, Ephesians 4:1–16. *Interpretation*, 295. https://doi.org/10.1177/002096439605100309.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The historical foundation for this unification project focused on Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Count Zinzendorf was an early proponent of ecumenical partnerships and unity among Christians. His work served as a basis for the emerging ministry and mission at SonRise Church while they remained focused on the things they had in common. These things included the concepts introduced in Ephesians 4, one body, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.

This chapter explores the historical foundation for this doctoral project by exploring the life and work of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Count Zinzendorf was an early proponent of ecumenical partnerships and unity among Christians. His work served as a basis for the emerging ministry and mission at SonRise Church.

Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760)

Dr. Kenneth Curtis, a Christian filmmaker said, "if there had been a Time Magazine in the 18th century, Zinzendorf would have been on it…twice."[1] Count

[1] Kenneth Curtis, "Zinzendorf: The Ecumenical Pioneer" Accessed January 19, 2023. https://www.Zinzendorf.com.

Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf was a transformative influence in the 18th century. Born a high-ranking nobleman, he set aside his privileged life to serve Jesus Christ.

Count Zinzendorf was born into position, power, and piety in Dresden on May 26, 1700.[2] His family was one of the twelve noble houses supporting the Austrian dynasty.[3] The Zinzendorf family "attained noble status in 1662 when Emperor Leopold conferred upon this family head the dignity of count of the Holy Roman Empire."[4] He was given the title Count Nicolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf at his birth. He was baptized into the Lutheran church soon after his birth and remained a Lutheran throughout his life. However, his spirituality was influenced by other faith practices as well.[5] At six weeks of age, his father died from tuberculosis, leaving his mother to rear him and his and his sister alone in Dresden. The three moved to her parent's estate; they were also well positioned in governmental leadership and of noble status.

Four years after the death of his father, Count Zinzendorf's mother, Charlotte Justina, Baroness of Gersdorf, married a field-marshal in the Prussian Army and she moved to Berlin.[6] Count Zinzendorf remained with his grandparents at Gross-Hennersdorf estate, sixty miles east of Dresden. His well-educated grandmother was an accomplished woman. She and her family were pietists and were well known in their faith circles. She often entertained leaders of the Pietist movement, and they influenced

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[2] John Rudolph Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1956), 13.

[3] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 13.

[4] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 13.

[5] August Gottlieb Spangenberg, *The Life of Nicholas Lewis Count Zinzendorf* (London, UK: Samuel Holdsworth, Amen-Corner. 1838), 1.

[6] Spangenberg, *The Life of Nicholas Lewis Count Zinzendorf,* 2.

Count Zinzendorf's faith development. Prayer, Bible reading, hymn-singing, and receiving Holy Communion were staples of his childhood. He grew to cherish Luther's Small Catechism.

> From his earliest childhood Zinzendorf manifested the glowing personal love for Christ – not merely as his Lord but as the truest and nearest of friends, which was the prime trait of his religious experience.[7]

Count Zinzendorf not only loved to hear about the Savior Jesus Christ, but he often wrote letters to Jesus. In 1706, the Swedish army overran Saxony and entered the Gross-Hennersdorf estate for supplies. There they found the young Count Zinzendorf.

> Entering the castle, they burst into the room where the six-year-old Count happened to be at his customary devotions. They almost forgot their mission, as awed were they as they heard the boy speak and pray. The incident was prophetic of the way the Count was to move others with the depth of his religious experience the rest of his sixty years.[8]

The intense Christian training he received as a young boy was a result of the family tradition from both sides of his family. The practice of pietism was simply intended to enhance his expected work as a Count, since full-time religious service was not considered to be an acceptable career for nobility. His early years at Hennersdorf gave him a solid foundation for his Christian faith, which was rooted primarily in Pietism and Lutheranism, but included an exposure to other faiths as well. The Count's deep attachment to Christ led him to stress the importance of confession and a belief that a child should know Christ from an early age and view Jesus as an older brother.[9]

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[7] Williston Walker, *Great Men of the Christian Church (*Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), 308.

[8] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 20.

[9] *Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760),* Moravian Church in America, (n.d.), https://www.moravian.org/bcm/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/05/Zinzendorf.pdf, 1.

At the age of ten, Count Zinzendorf was sent to Halle, a pietist boarding school under the direction of August Francke.[10] There, he had to adjust to the idea that he was only one of many children of noble parentage. For the first few years, he struggled; he was challenged by his teachers and bullied by his peers. Finally, after a great deal of work, he became a competent student.

Count Zinzendorf's learnings at Halle were not limited to academic pursuits. He also developed in his faith, and his studies continued to be distracted by religious pursuits. Count Zinzendorf and his friends "organized a club called 'The Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed.' The purposes of this group included: total commitment to God, pure living, love for others, and doing mission work among the Jews and heathen."[11] This community focused on the love of God, and it continued throughout his lifetime.

In 1716, Count Zinzendorf matriculated to the University of Wittenburg, a school based in the Lutheran tradition.[12] While Wittenberg prepared children of the nobility for service, it was not consistent with the more personal faith of a Pietist, which emphasized personal piety and an emotional component to the life of faith. Count Zinzendorf worked diligently to reconcile his Lutheran heritage with his Pietist beliefs but was unsuccessful. He maintained his heart for Pietist tradition as compared to the Lutheran tradition, which symbolized a largely intellectual faith. Count Zinzendorf believed having a personal salvation built on an individual's spiritual relationship with Christ.

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[10] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 23.

[11] *Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760),* Moravian Church in America, (n.d.), https://www.moravian.org/bcm/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/05/Zinzendorf.pdf, 2.

[12] Walker, *Great Men of the Christian Church,* 309.

Count Zinzendorf struggled with his conflicting desire to study for the ministry and his family's expectation that he would fulfill his hereditary role as a count. At Wittenberg, Count Zinzendorf studied law. However, his personal studies centered on divinity as he desired to be a preacher of the gospel.[13] He attended all the lectures on civil law in order to prepare himself for his work in the state. However, "he pursued his theological studies in particular, with prayer, and devoted many hours to the composition of hymns and spiritual poems. His parents, not permitting him to devote himself to the study of divinity, he learnt it more at the feet of Jesus, than through the medium of human instruction."[14] He resolved to serve as a preacher in 1717 "in order that he might save his soul and saw greater danger in any other station of which he could form himself an idea, than in the clerical office."[15] Count Zinzendorf completed his studies at Wittenburg in 1719, leaving on good terms with his professors and fellow students.

As was customary practice, Count Zinzendorf embarked on a two-year study tour through Europe visiting locations in Holland, Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, and France. He attended lectures, visited museums, and developed relationships with a number of religious leaders of the time. One of the most formational experiences on his trip was his visit to an art gallery in Dusseldorf.

> Among all the masterpieces the one which left its mark upon his was a thorn crowned *Ecce Homo* (Behold the Man) by Domenico Feti. Beneath it was the Latin inscription: "This I have suffered for you, but what have you done for me?" He thought that he could answer very little and prayed to the Savior to draw him into the "fellowship of his suffering" whenever

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[13] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 35.

[14] Spangenberg, *The Life of Nicholas Lewis Count Zinzendorf,* 13.

[15] Spangenberg, *The Life of Nicholas Lewis Count Zinzendorf,* 13.

> he was disposed to wander from it. Such an experience was hardly to lead him toward the goal his travels were supposed to achieve; namely, to round him off as a man of the world.[16]

Count Zinzendorf's response was to clarify his dedication to Christ and commit himself to doing whatever God would lead him to do. This was Count Zinzendorf's "Yes" moment to his call to ministry. However, he returned to Dresden in 1721 to enter into political service and assumed his duties as a young noble in the court of King August the Strong as was the expectation.

In May 1721, when Count Zinzendorf reached the age of maturity, he purchased Berthelsdorf, an estate owned by his grandmother. This estate was located only a few miles from the estate of his youth, Gross-Hennersdorf. He continued to spend several months of the year in Dresden working in service to the royal court. The balance of his time was spent at his Berthelsdorf estate. At Berthelsdorf, he focused on updating the building and grounds, but his thoughts soon turned to marriage. On September 7, 1722, he married Countess Erdmuth Dorothea von Reuss, who held the same religious beliefs and ideals as he held. Count Zinzendorf remained focused on serving Christ, and his wife assisted him in that endeavor. While Count Zinzendorf continued his work in Dresden, and hosted Bible studies in his apartment, the Countess Erdmuth successfully took over the financial affairs of the estate. She was an excellent manager and turned the fledgling estate into a profitable business. Count Zinzendorf remained committed to his vocation, never giving up his vision to form a Chistian community at Berthelsdorf.

This vision was soon fulfilled when Christian David, a Moravian exile, arrived at his door at Berthelsdorf. Count Zinzendorf was immediately sympathetic to the plight of

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[16] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 42.

Christian David and his fellow Moravians. He promised to provide a place for several of the exiles to stay until they found permanent homes. The first group arrived in December 1722. They occupied a temporary residence as they built the first home for the initial ten refugees. A settlement began to form and was called "'Herrnhut,' with the hope that a community might arise there which should not only be 'unter des Herrn Hut' (under the Lord's watch) but also 'auf des Herrn Hut' (on the watch for the Lord)."[17] This community went mostly unnoticed by Count Zinzendorf until he passed by on his way home for a Christmas celebration. One evening in December 1722, he stopped to wish them good wishes of the season and joined them in prayer. He felt an immediate spiritual kinship with the group. Over the next five years, the Herrnhut community increased the numbers of Moravians living there as a result of Christian David's travels and work to lead setters to the new community. Count Zinzendorf spent more and more time at Berthelsdorf and Herrnhut and less in Dresden, until, finally in 1727, he was granted a leave of absence from the court in Dresden.

The Berthelsdorf Church attracted Lutheran Pietists and members of several other denominations, which grew the church and the community to around 300 people.

> Soon religious-minded people of all shades of theologic opinion and most various origins were flocking to this new Christian Community. The thought was that here a town could be erected inhabited only by Christians, separate from the world, a real communion of saints…seeking to live the Christian life.[18]

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[17] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf, 62.*

[18] Walker, *Great Men of the Christian Church,* 310.

This was the ideal situation for Count Zinzendorf. He had long desired for an ecumenical feeling where the spiritual unity of Christian believers would be the hallmark of the community.

Trouble soon developed. The wide variety of denominations at Herrnhut created conflict within the community. They "could not find a bond in strict doctrinal unity."[19] Areas of conflict included Sunday liturgy, meaning of the Lord's Supper, election, and individual versus corporate confession, among others. Secular issues, including economic pressure and language difficulties, added to the conflict. Count Zinzendorf was determined the community would not fail and took matters into his own hands. His goal was to "remain in as close connection as possible with the Lutheran communion of his birth, but he found it necessary to preserve the old Moravian forms" as well.[20] He visited from family to family, sharing scripture and encouragement. Steps toward cooperation and love began to emerge. Finally, Count Zinzendorf developed a constitution of sorts that outlined the system of church and civic organization. On May 12, 1727, the "Brotherly Agreement of the Brethren from Bohemia and Moravia and others, Binding Them to Walk According to the Apostolic Rule" was unanimously and warmly accepted by the group.[21] Additional civic organization took place and small spiritual groups, called "Bands," were organized for spiritual support and accountability. With this organization and cooperation in place, Herrnhut hoped to successfully manage conflicts on its own. However, underlying conflict continued at Herrnhut, until the official church at

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[19] Walker, *Great Men of the Christian Church,* 310.

[20] Walker, *Great Men of the Christian Church,* 310.

[21] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 75.

Berthelsdorf became Lutheran and the society at Herrnhut became a Unity of Brethren Congregation, also known as Moravian.

Pietism continued at Herrnhut, and groups began to travel to neighboring towns, encouraging believers in personal Bible study and pious living. These visits inspired Count Zinzendorf; he still had a constant desire to share the gospel, a desire which began with his creation of "the Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed" from his youth. Count Zinzendorf encouraged the Moravians to maintain the disciplines they had developed, and he gave them the vision to take the gospel to the neglected people in the far corners of the world. In 1732, the first missionaries were sent to the West Indies.[22]

Count Zinzendorf held a theology of missions that the missionaries were to keep in mind when evangelizing the non-believer. The abiding presence of Christ in the world was of utmost importance. Count Zinzendorf believed that Christ was central to personal faith, meeting people where they were through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, then, was the only true missionary and humans were simply agents of the Holy Spirit, who brought Christ to those the Holy Spirit has already prepared to hear the Word of God. Count Zinzendorf instructed the missionaries to preach Christ first because the non-believer already believed in God.[23] His directions to missionaries said:

> First, the missionary is never to lord it over the heathen but to live humbly among them. Second, the missionary is to come directly to the point and preach the crucified Christ. Third, the aim is not to convert whole nations but to look out for individual seekers after truth.[24]

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[22] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 99.

[23] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 99.

[24] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 100.

The primary goal for missionaries under Count Zinzendorf's direction was to increase Christ's kingdom, not support their own denominational expansion.

While not all missionary journeys were successful, the work continued throughout Europe, in areas of the Caribbean, and eventually to colonial America. The Moravians were able to establish a permanent presence in colonial America in 1741, settling on the Pennsylvania estate of George Whitefield. Moravian settlers purchased 500 acres to establish the settlement of Bethlehem in 1741.[25] Soon, they bought the 5,000 acres of the Barony of Nazareth from Whitefield's manager, and the two communities of Bethlehem and Nazareth became intricately linked in their agricultural and industrial economy. Count Zinzendorf sought to unify the protestants of the area, and he proposed a council of churches where all would maintain their denominational ties but work cooperatively rather than competitively. Count Zinzendorf argued that since there was no history in the new world, then there was no need for denominations.

It was natural that Count Zinzendorf was attracted to Pennsylvania as a place to establish a religious colony. The colony was only one of two colonies "to establish freedom of religion in its constitution as a principle of conscience, not convenience. Pennsylvania was the most irreligious of the colonies in America."[26] "This not only agreed with Count Zinzendorf's own view of toleration, but it also meant that [the Moravians] could work in relative freedom."[27] Pennsylvania had a substantial number of

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[25] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 151.

[26] Craig D. Atwood, *Blood, Sex, and Death: Life and Liturgy in Zinzendorf's Bethlehem* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1995), 109.

[27] Atwood, *Blood, Sex, and Death: Life and Liturgy in Zinzendorf's Bethlehem,* 109.

German immigrants but very few religious leaders. In 1741, the first meeting house was constructed in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.[28] Count Zinzendorf's goal there was outlined in his "Pennsylvania Plan." "Schools were to be established, itinerant evangelists sent to awaken unbelievers and to reawaken lethargic believers, existing congregations would be reformed, and works of mercy accomplished."[29]

> Given his expanded concern for the unity and peace of the Church, he sought to end the bickering and continual fracturing among German protestants. He wanted a broad Christian community in which the [religious groups] kept their separate identities yet shared the essentials of the faith, reach the unconverted, and grew in devotion and discipleship.[30]

While Count Zinzendorf helped with the organization of the community, he was more interested in evangelizing the native tribes. He made three trips into the wilderness to meet with the native leaders, but none of his visits yielded any successful conversions in faith. On one of his expeditions, he clearly demonstrated his inability to get along with the natives and his inability to thrive in the wilderness. When he arrived in the wilderness, he pitched his tent more than 100 yards from the Indian village and spent much of his time reading and writing. He considered the Indians crude and made no effort to hide his feelings.[31] He was thrown from a horse, ran out of provisions, and unsuccessfully navigated waterways.

Unfortunate developments in Europe called him back to Herrnhut earlier than expected, but he did not abandon the brethren in Bethlehem. Count Zinzendorf's work

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[28] Atwood, *Blood, Sex, and Death: Life and Liturgy in Zinzendorf's Bethlehem,* 111.

[29] W. H. Wagner, *The Zinzendorf-Muhlenberg Encounter: A controversy in Search of Understanding* (Nazareth, PA: Moravian Historical Society, 2002), 89.

[30] W. H. Wagner, *The Zinzendorf-Muhlenberg Encounter: A Controversy in Search of Understanding,* 90.

[31] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 176.

with the Europeans in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania continued from a distance. The Bethlehem community maintained its relationships with the European Moravians, who stressed worldwide unity. After Count Zinzendorf's return in 1743, they stayed in contact through letters and the travels of other Moravian missionaries. Sermons and devotional writings of Count Zinzendorf were popular reading material.[32]

Count Zinzendorf shifted his focus to administration of Moravian society and centered his work in London, England. There, he continued to lead Moravian society and began to build a team of leaders to take over the responsibilities of the society and the mission movement for which they are known. He developed a "tropus" system. Tropus meant the "way of teaching" and utilized the idea that each tradition has common beliefs but allows for each to implement them in a unique way. The tropus reflected the work of the ecumenical movement and the desire to focus on what united churches rather than divided them. God works in different ways in different churches. Count Zinzendorf developed the tropus concept for the Moravian Church to preserve the integrity of the different traditions of the Moravian Church. In this system, each Moravian sect had their own way of teaching while falling under one unified umbrella.

In September 1741 in England Count Zinzendorf first encountered John Wesley, who was part of the Methodist Movement. Weinlick writes, "Though the two were together only twice, the clash between their personalities was undoubtedly the chief factor behind their two churches going along separate courses. Each was born to rule."[33] Both were aristocrats, and both were quick to resent aristocracy in others; this aggravated

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[32] Atwood, *Blood, Sex, and Death: Life and Liturgy in Zinzendorf's Bethlehem,* 132.

[33] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf,* 216.

their theological differences. However, it is not likely that the two societies would have remained together since their evangelistic methods and philosophes differed greatly.

After nearly two decades, Count Zinzendorf returned to Herrnhut. His return was a positive one as he was welcomed as a pastor and beloved disciple rather than Lord of the manor. He developed a representative leadership team to serve alongside him and fill his areas of deficiency. His wife, Countess Erdmuth Zinzendorf, died on June 19, 1756. Count Zinzendorf grieved her death and responded by traveling from congregation to congregation and taking long retreats in seclusion. One year later, Count Zinzendorf married Anna Nitschmann, an Eldress in the community and a longtime confidant. They continued their rounds visiting congregations and focusing on missions. He continued to work until the day of his death on May 9, 1760, at Herrnhut. Anna survived her husband for only thirteen days.

Count Zinzendorf – Ecumenical Pioneer[34]

Count Zinzendorf was an ecumenical pioneer and participated in many opportunities to illustrate his dedication to ecumenism. Count Zinzendorf's life proved the importance of ecumenical relationships. He was a Lutheran nobleman who held deep pietist roots. He was considered to be a Lutheran clergyperson and a Moravian bishop, and a church leader with connections to the Evangelical Revival, the Anglican Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. Through his educational experience, he attended school

[34] The word pioneer may be problematic for some as it has colonialist and expansionist connotations. It was used to describe Count Zinzendorf as the first to do this type of ecumenical work. The use of this term was initiated by Moravian minister and author A.J. Lewis in the title of his book, Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer.

at Halle before matriculating to Wittenberg University. While at Halle, he studied under Francke, whose ideas were opposed at Wittenberg. Zinzendorf attempted to bring together representatives of Halle Pietism with the orthodox Lutheran scholars at Wittenberg but failed with this attempt. During his life at Herrnhut, he tried to reconcile the contrasting traditions of the Moravian refugees with others who settled on his estate. A brotherly agreement was achieved, and their life together at Herrnhut strengthened their community around one mission. This mission was to increase Christ's kingdom. Missionary work was important to his ecumenism, and included the society at Herrnhut's missions to Europe, the West Indies, and North America. He was met with the goal of developing cooperative relationships with regional European churches and the churches in mission territories.[35]

Finally, the Moravians settlements in Pennsylvania offered an opportunity for ecumenism.

> They convened in January 1742, an ecumenical gathering of Protestants, most of German background, including Lutherans, reformed, Moravians, Quakers, Mennonites, Baptists, Schwenkfelders, Separatists, Hermits, Inspired and others. Seven formative meetings were held from January to June 1742, after which quarterly meetings were held. What began as a conference of different religious traditions to enable cooperative witness, had, by the conclusion of the third meeting, developed into a "Church of God in the Spirit." Sometimes calling itself the Pennsylvania General Synod, it became an ecumenical community of churches intending to function together while retaining the identity of their traditions.[36]

Count Zinzendorf learned a great deal through these ecumenical experiences and formulated a personal theology that reflected his fascination in ecumenism. The unifying

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[35] Arthur J. Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf: an ecumenical pioneer," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36 no. 3/4 (Summer/Fall1999): 291.

[36] Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf: an ecumenical pioneer," 294.

bond of heart-piety, or the love of the savior, was central to his approach to ecumenism. He considered the heart to be the source of religious knowledge. "Zinzendorf spoke of it as an inner organ of perception that can know religious truth in a direct and objective way that reason, useful in relation to other matters, cannot."[37] The heart-piety was not a feeling or emotion; it was a deep internal knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior. Consequently, the unified church community was based on a shared experience and deep understanding of Jesus Christ who led the community in the traditions of the church. The universal church included all who share this heart relationship with the Savior.

The character of the Savior was also important to Count Zinzendorf and his developing community. The community understood that the Savior was born into the world as a baby, suffered under the same conditions as any human, and died on the cross. The suffering and wounded Savior is the foundation for the church, with all the characteristics associated with that, including the Lamb who endures, who is patient, open, content, self-composed, gentle, and kind. The crucifixion provided absolution for human original sin and removed the devil's control over humanity. God has given humans freedom to choose God's grace and to resist Satan and sin. "The grace that frees us from sin and Satan is the grace of the person of the Savior, not only the consequence of his deeds. Grace is bound to a person and not saving acts."[38] Humans always needed grace, and followers needed to be reminded that grace, holiness, and justification, are all gifts from God and the Savior.

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[37] Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf: an ecumenical pioneer," 294.

[38] Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf: an ecumenical pioneer," 296.

Another common understanding in Count Zinzendorf's theology for ecumenism was that God and the Savior are one. Through knowledge of the Savior, believers were introduced to the fullness of God. Salvation was a continuation of the creation by which the Savior brings each person to the fullness of life intended for him or her.

With regard to unity of Christian traditions, Count Zinzendorf viewed the various Christian traditions as different expressions of the work and life of the Creator and Savior. "The variety is not an accident but the intention of God who works in personally, culturally, and historically specific ways."[39] The unity of the Christian traditions was not found in common agreement on theology or polity, but in the common belief in Jesus Christ. The common understanding focused on an understanding of who the Savior was. Freeman summarizes, "Here an affinity is evident between Count Zinzendorf and the tradition of the Ancient Moravian Church, which defined the single essential as relationship with God, the Father, Son and Spirit, responded to in faith, love and hope."[40] For Count Zinzendorf, everything else, such as scripture, church, sacraments, liturgy, were all secondary to the relationship with the trinitarian God.

Count Zinzendorf had a similar theology around scripture. First, he believed that since all scripture was inspired by God, it must be read in historical perspective. However, there was a legitimate use of scripture for the purpose of revealing the person of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Count Zinzendorf also proposed that scripture is clearly expressed with regard to Christ and salvation. However, mysteries exist in the scripture that are not clearly defined and thus require the work of a scholar.

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[39] Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf: an ecumenical pioneer," 297.

[40] Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf: an ecumenical pioneer," 297.

While Count Zinzendorf recognized the importance of confessions and creeds, he did not believe that all matters needed to be resolved for unity to be achieved. Disagreement in unity was always a possibility and opened the door for greater understanding and growth. He expressed that God would lead the follower in growth and understanding when the time was appropriate. When differences arose and modifications needed to be made to our faith expressions, the most essential thing was to remain open to what kept us, "loving and being open to the wounded Savior, and thus, open to all who share that relationship."[41]

Conclusion

Count Zinzendorf's theology was Christ-centered and quite innovative for the time. It focused on a personal experience in a relationship with Christ and an emotional experience of salvation rather than a legalistic one. It was often referred to as "heart religion." Much of Count Zinzendorf's thinking focused on missionary outreach and renewal. He envisioned denominations joining together to develop a dynamic renewal of Christian society which revitalized existing denominations and helped create new mission work.

Count Zinzendorf's influence on church history was felt far beyond the boundaries of the Pietistic "heart religion" he had preached so fervently.[42] Count

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[41] Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf: an ecumenical pioneer," 298.

[42] *Encyclopedia Britannica,* "Nikolaus Ludwig, count von Zinzendorf," January 1, 2024, accessed January 19, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nikolaus-Ludwig-Graf-von-Zinzendorf.

Zinzendorf emphasized the manifestation of religious feelings and emotions in community. His focus on ecumenicism was stressed in many of his sermons.

Count Zinzendorf did not think that all denominations should be abolished; rather he sought after unity in the diversity, encouraging respect for differences while focusing on a common belief in Jesus Christ. The variety [of denominations] was not a historical accident, but the intention of the God who worked personally, culturally, in historically specific ways.[43] He taught that the unity of the Christian traditions should not be found in attaining common agreement on points of faith or order but found in recognition of a common Savior and Creator.

Count Zinzendorf's theology focused on simple devotion to the crucified Christ, and he wanted his movement to awaken Christians in all denominations, encouraging them to increase their love for Christ.[44] Count Zinzendorf was an early proponent of ecumenical partnerships and unity among Christians. As SonRise Church developed new mission and vision statements at the grassroots level, and worked into a new vision, it was the goal to become a more cohesive team, work together in unity, and build up the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. It was a process that entered into and engaged so that the community grew in faith and matured in their relationship with Christ. The work of unity required a great deal of effort for all those involved. Unity within the church should contribute to the building of the kingdom of God. The theology of Count

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[43] Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf: an ecumenical pioneer," 298.

[44] Arthur J. Freeman, *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart the Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf,* (Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church in America, 1998), 73-78.

Zinzendorf served as a basis for the emerging ministry and mission at SonRise Church as the church community focused on the things that unite instead of the things that divide.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

SonRise Church officially merged and became federated by a unanimous vote of the congregation at their annual business meeting on December 1, 2023. While this was a moment to celebrate, it was not the silver-bullet solution to unify two theologically different congregations. Building on the biblical foundation's common concepts found in Ephesians 4 of one body, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all and on the historical foundation of Zinzendorf's ecumenism, this doctoral project seeks to develop a plan of unity within the newly merged and federated congregation.

As a basis for this work, this chapter explored the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. This doctrine served as the theological foundation for common understanding in a newly federated church and lead the congregation forward in unity as they ministered to one another, the community and beyond.

Priesthood of All Believers

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers proclaimed that those who have a common faith in Christ also shared in Christ's royal priesthood. Therefore, "every

believer has equal access to [God] through Jesus without a human mediator."[1] Every believer also had the responsibility to exercise their priesthood. While not every believer has been called to teach or preach the word of God, all were called by God to do something that would ultimately build upon their faith and serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the same time, a clear functional difference existed among individual Christians. Martin Luther, a German priest and seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation who developed the doctrine of priesthood of all believers, never lost sight of the fact that God established the public pastoral office through the congregation's call and for its sake.[2] Not all were called to be pastoral leaders, as all did not have the same work to do. The pastoral leader of a congregation was not guaranteed a special status.[3] While pastoral leadership was a special calling in which a person practiced spiritual leadership on behalf of others, it was not a special or higher status. Other special callings might have been teaching, providing care, or working in another areas of service.

Several scriptural texts supported Martin Luther's idea of priesthood of all believers. 1 Peter 2:4-10 illustrates this theme as it referred to the three interrelated strands of temple, royal priesthood, and sacrifice. All three related back to Jesus Christ as the royal priest or the living stone who was precious to God. Followers were part of the royal priesthood who offer sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. Believers, then, were a community of priests who had direct access to God.

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[1] Rachel Ciano, "Luther's Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers: The Importance for Today." *Credo Magazine.* January 8, 2020, 2.

[2] Davidson Razafiarivony, "A Biblical Assessment of Luther's View of Priesthood of all Believers and he Office of Ministry," *The American Journal of Biblical Theology,* 22 no 22 (May 30, 2021):10.

[3] Davidson Razafiarivony, "A Biblical Assessment of Luther's View of Priesthood of all Believers and he Office of Ministry," 7.

Paul's epistles echoed the teachings of Peter in several places. Examples were found in the New Testament texts of Romans, Philippians, and Hebrews. In Romans, Paul encouraged believers in his letter to the Romans to offer their own bodies as living sacrifices to God.[4] In Philippians, Paul portrayed the believers as priests who served by offering their sacrificial partnership in the gospel because of their faith.[5] The book of Hebrews also spoke about the priesthood of the church. Believers were encouraged to draw near to the throne of grace in prayer[6] and to live out their priestly calling as they love one another.[7]

Martin Luther did not coin the phrase priesthood of all believers, but it was his actions that first brought the idea to the forefront as he encouraged the development of the concept. Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses, which outlined his challenges toward the church and eventually lead to the reformation, included his argument against the elevated authority of clergy. Martin Luther argued that "every Christian had the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary."[8] Believers lives should be characterized by love. This love manifested itself as service to God, church, and neighbor.

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[4] Romans 12:1-2.

[5] Philippians 2:17.

[6] Hebrews 4:16.

[7] Hebrews 13:1-3.

[8] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ: A Vision for the Priesthood of All Believers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 77.

Priesthood of All Believers - Biblical View

As stated, I Peter 2:4-10 upheld the theme of the priesthood of all believers as it referred to three interrelated strands of temple, royal priesthood, and sacrifice. It says:

> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.[9]

All three strands, temple, priesthood and sacrifice, related back to Jesus Christ as the royal priest or the living stone, who was rejected by humans but is "chosen and precious to God."[10] Christians were also like living stones through their connection to Jesus the living stone. Christians, like stones, were built into a spiritual house to form the temple, the people of God. Verse five continued referring to God's people as the temple people, which alluded to their priesthood.

The people were "built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices."[11] The spiritual house of priests illustrated the communal nature of the priesthood of God and illustrated that followers are part of the royal priesthood who offered sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. Believers, then, were a community of priests who have direct access to God. "They have this priestly role by virtue of God's election in Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit."[12] They fulfilled this priestly role through their spiritual sacrifices, which is their priestly witness, in both word

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[9] I Peter 2:4-5.

[10] 1 Peter 2:4.

[11] 1 Peter 2:5.

[12] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 47.

and deed. This is completed though the power of the Holy Spirit and thus was acceptable to God. These spiritual sacrifices of the new priesthood contrasted with the "old Hebrew priesthood offering animal sacrifices."[13] The new priesthood was to do good works of word and deed, bring glory to God, and bring unbelievers to Christ.

This theme continues in 1 Peter 2:9,

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.[14]

This verse elaborated on the preciousness, holiness, and vocation of the royal priesthood. The royal priesthood existed to declare the excellence, virtues, mighty acts, and praises of God. The royal priesthood was to walk out of the darkness into to the light of Christ, doing good deeds in obedience to Christ.

Paul's epistles implicitly echoed the teachings of Peter in several places. In Romans 12, Paul wrote:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.[15]

Paul encouraged believers to offer their own bodies as living sacrifices to God as a replacement for the animal sacrifice on the altar which was commonly found in Old

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[13] Clifford Hill and Monica Hill, "The Priesthood of All Believers," *International Congregational Journal* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 127. https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.ohiolink.edu: 9100/ login. aspx?direct=true&db =a9h&AN= 109452044&site=ehost-live.

[14] I Peter 2:9.

[15] Romans 12:1-2.

Testament scripture. Believers were to commit their whole selves in service to Christ as a response to God's saving work. This calling to a royal priesthood was not just a call to the individual but also the corporate church body.[16] Raoul Dederen, Adventist Theologian and educator supports this corporate response, writing:

> The priesthood is viewed in a collective sense as belonging to the whole body of believers. In every instance whether in 1 Peter or Revelation, the words priest and priesthood are used collectively. The community of Christian believers, not just the individuals, is priestly.[17]

Additionally, the priestly service of all believers involved all turning from sinful patterns to being transformed for the purpose of responding to God's will. The renewed mind enabled believers to both discern God's will and to do what is good and pleasing to God.[18] Therefore, in Romans, the offering of oneself in service to Christ, conformity to God's ways, and proclamation of the gospel were the central aspects of priestly ministry.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he portrayed the believers as priests who serve by their sacrificial partnership in the gospel because of their faith.[19] Paul's suffering for the sake of the gospel was pictured as a "drink offering" poured out on…the "sacrificial offering" saying, "But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you."[20] This priesthood took place in the midst of suffering, particularly on behalf of the gospel. It involved giving of oneself for the purpose of advancing the good news of God's saving

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[16] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 49.

[17] Raoul Dederen, "The Priesthood of 'All" Believers," *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 20.

[18] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 49.

[19] Philippians 2:17.

[20] Philippians 2:17.

work. Later in Philippians, the scripture spoke of financial gifts as, "a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."[21] This priestly view of finances highlighted the idea of the royal priesthood as represented in the New Testament. Any service rendered on behalf of the gospel was received as sacrificial service. It was a pleasing offering to God.

The letter to the Hebrews, traditionally attributed to Paul, also referenced the priesthood of the church. "In Hebrews 4:16 believers are encouraged, by virtue of Christ's high priestly work, to draw near to the throne of grace in confident prayer."[22] This referred to priestly access to the sanctuary and the holy of holies area of the tabernacle, where God dwelled. However, Christ opened access to God for all believers through their confession that Jesus is the Christ.

> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.[23]

Hebrews also encouraged believers to fulfill their priestly calling by showing hospitality, loving one another, and remaining faithful to all the commandments of God. Since the sacrifice of God through Jesus Christ was greater than the Old Testament animal sacrifices, the church was encouraged to offer sacrifices of kindness and generosity to extend the priestly role beyond the church to everyday life. In Hebrews, the priesthood of

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[21] Philippians 4:18.

[22] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 51.

[23] Hebrews 10:19-22.

the believer was rooted in Christ's priestly sacrifice and included access to God and a call to service.

The book of Revelation addressed the royal priesthood of all believers though its imagery. First, it included a call for believers to be, "a kingdom and priests to serve God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever!"[24] Second, it included a calling to serve God: "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."[25] Third, Revelation 20 spoke of saints reigning with Christ for a thousand years, a period in which they would also be priests of God and of Christ.[26] As a result of our belief in Christ, the scriptures told us that each believer has priestly access, privilege, and duties with Christ and one another. The main functions of the royal priesthood were to offer spiritual sacrifices, serve the Lord, and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. Every member of the priesthood of all believers was called to ministry in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is this understanding of the biblical view of the priesthood of all believers that shaped Martin Luther's understanding and fueled his actions that lead to the reformation.

Priesthood of All Believers for Martin Luther

The priesthood of all believers was one of the central principles of the 16th century Reformation and the cornerstone of Martin Luther's understanding of the church. While it was reported that Martin Luther never actually used the term "priesthood of all

[24] Revelation 1:6.

[25] Revelation 5:10.

[26] Revelation 20:4-6.

believers," and the closest he came was, "the general priesthood of all baptized believers," he did refer to baptized believers as "priests."[27] According to Lutheran theologian Eric Gritsch, "Luther's doctrine of the common priesthood of all believers, developed particularly in his treatise of 1520, is one of the most revolutionary doctrines in the history of Christianity."[28]

In his writing, Martin Luther shared his dissatisfaction with the Catholic church alleging that there was a major barrier between the clergy and laity. He sought to remove the barrier through the idea of the priesthood of all believers. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers meant that everyone who was baptized and had faith in Christ is designated a priests and shares in Christ's royal priesthood. This was both a privilege and a responsibility. Historian Rachel Ciano maintained "every believer has equal access to the Father through Jesus. The corollary is that every believer has the responsibility to function as a priest to other believers, to minister to them, particularly through proclaiming Scripture to them."[29]

Martin Luther contended that all Christians were equal before God. Anizor and Voss supported this stating, "Luther labored hard to help his generation understand that maturity in Christ meant embracing the privileges and responsibilities of the priesthood of all believers."[30] The priesthood of all believers became a cornerstone of the

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[27] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ, 18*.

[28] Mark Rogers, "A Dangerous Idea? Martin Luther, E. Y. Mullins, and the Priesthood of All Believers," *Westminster Theological Journal* 72, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 119–34. https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.ohiolink.edu:9100/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=50410331&site=ehost-live. 120.

[29] Rachel Ciano, "Luther's Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers," 1.

[30] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 151.

ecclesiology of Martin Luther and his rejection of the Roman Catholic understanding of priesthood. According to Martin Luther, "every Christian is someone else's priest, and we are all priests to one another. Every person is a priest by virtue of his or her baptism…They proclaim the word to each other, intercede with God on behalf of each other, and offer sacrifices on behalf of each other."[31] Luther based his understanding on the priesthood of Christ within the meaning of baptism. As a result, he dismantled the distinction between clergy and laity. Ordained clergy differed from the un-ordained laity only in relation to function, not status. At the time of Martin Luther's posting of the ninety-five theses, there was a practice to elevate the ordained clergy. He did not support this practice. Rather, according to Ciano, "Luther maintained that there was no spiritual divide between priests and laity. There is only one estate to which all baptized believers belong. Because justification by faith puts all baptized believers on one equal footing, there are no levels of spirituality or hierarchy in accessing God."[32]

The priesthood of all believers meant that there could only be one world, one spiritual estate—all of which belonged to God. This coincided with Paul's affirmation in I Corinthians 12:12-13 where he wrote:

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.[33]

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[31] Hershel H. Hobbs, *You Are Chosen: The Priesthood of all Believers* (San Francisco, CA: Harper &Row. 1990), 14.

[32] Rachel Ciano, "Luther's Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers," 2.

[33] I Corinthians 12:12-13.

This was consistent with the Letter to the Ephesians, where it was written: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call…"[34]

For the sake of order in churches, Martin Luther maintained a distinction in the role and office of different believers. He saw the ministerial office as essential to the church. Those who were to perform as priests were chosen from the congregation to serve in a function that is primarily to conduct the ministry of Word and sacrament. However, he also acknowledged that there was a great divide between clergy and laity. Many of the baptized followers were not encouraged to know and proclaim God's word or permitted to have the Scriptures in their common language.[35] Martin Luther worked diligently to provide for their learning by commissioning and developing a Bible in the German language. His commitment to translate God's word into the vernacular and his equipping of the whole people of God to teach God's word to themselves and one another resulted in a wider exposure to the scriptures. It also expanded Martin Luther's concept of the priesthood of all believers.

On several occasions, Martin Luther outlined the specific duties and responsibilities of Christian priests. In "Concerning the Ministry," a letter to the Bohemian Christians written in 1523, he described in some detail the rights and privileges of a priest as he represented God to other Christians and the world. He identified seven priestly functions: (1) to teach and preach the word of God; (2) to baptize; (3) to administer the Lord's supper; (4) to bind and loose sins; (5) to pray for

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[34] Ephesians 4:4.

[35] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 152.

others; (6) to sacrifice; and (7) to judge doctrine and spirits. These seven priestly duties were various forms of the ministry of the word of God.[36]

Martin Luther believed that preaching and teaching the word of God was the responsibility of every believer. Even though not everyone held the pastoral office, every Christian had the right and the duty to teach the word of God at every opportunity. While Martin Luther supported the distinction between the office and function of preaching, he also maintained that every believer had an unofficial ministry of the word. The priesthood of all believers requires every Christian to declare God's word to others in personal conversation. While church law only allowed ordained priests to baptize, Martin Luther permitted all Christians to administer baptism in emergency situations. Since baptism is a chief form of the proclamation of the Word of God, every believer was given the honor of both verbally and visually preaching the gospel in the church.[37] The same was also true of the Lord's supper.

In addition, Martin Luther also upheld that the "power of the keys," or absolution of sins, belongs to all Christians. This act was also considered an application of the proclamation of the gospel to which all are called. It is held that prayer is the common right of all believers. And again, he believed that all Christians have access to God and may intercede for others. He supported this through the many directives in scripture to pray for one another. These scriptural bases supported the common priesthood of God's people.

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[36] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 145.

[37] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 79.

The priestly duty of sacrifice was also available to all believers. Anizor and Voss suggested that sacrifice in this sense was a spiritual sacrifice offered, as outlined in the scriptures, as a result of the gospel message acting in our hearts and lives.[38] The understanding of spiritual sacrifice was tied to Martin Luther's doctrine of vocation, where it affects our entire lives including our everyday work, farming, baking, parenting, building, is a sacrifice of service to God, if all of our lives are offered to God as a response to our faith in Christ.[39] Any vocation could be a calling from God with this type of personal commitment.

The final function, the judging of doctrine, was also a ministry of the entire church. Martin Luther said, "It is the duty of the Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error. If every Christian as a priest can preach the Word, the same may judge doctrine. All believers share in the privilege and responsibility of rightly handling the word of God."[40] It is important to note that while believers shared in the privilege and responsibility, they should also temper their impulse to become judgmental and overstep their call by acting as a judge in place of God. Followers of Christ were to support and strengthen the flock through love and grace that God offered.

Martin Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was both Christ-centered and community-centered. It was Christ-centered "with each individual believer

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[38] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 79.

[39] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 80.

[40] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 80.

deriving his status as a priest from his union with Christ through faith alone."[41] It was community-centered, "with each believer serving as a priest to other believers, helping them draw near to God and maintain justifying faith throughout life."[42] Ultimately, this doctrine was also Word-centered. The Reformation principle of "sola scriptura," or scripture alone, was clearly demonstrated in Martin Luther's understanding of the priesthood of all believers. He wrote, "when we grant the Word to anyone, we cannot deny anything to him pertaining to the exercise of his priesthood."[43] All readers of the scripture might have done so without the help or mediation of another. Everyone should have equal access to the Word of God.

Within this framework, Martin Luther did not intend to create an individualistic focus on ministry or church leadership; rather, he intended to affirm the dignity and right of every Christian access to God while highlighting the responsibility associated with it. This responsibility included each believer's call to share the word of God within the community and to affirm the mission of the community in the world.[44]

Professor and theologian Uche Anizor summarized Martin Luther's contribution by writing that Martin Luther:

> offers a vision of Christians as priests, carrying with them certain privileges and responsibilities. As priestly servants they live for the betterment of the church and the salvation of the world, bearing the joyful burden of announcing the word of God to all in need. As this takes place,

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[41] Mark Rogers, "A Dangerous Idea?" 123.

[42] Mark Rogers, "A Dangerous Idea?" 123.

[43] Mark Rogers, "A Dangerous Idea?" 123.

[44] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 82.

> God works powerfully to reform the church and to continually conform it to the likeness of the great high priest.[45]

Hershel H. Hobbs' summary was much simpler, "It is a great privilege to be a priest of our Lord. But it is an even greater responsibility."[46]

Each century since the Reformation has seen the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers implemented in different ways by different denominations. In the rise of Methodism in the eighteenth century, John Wesley held a similar theology of the priesthood of all believers to that of Martin Luther. However, Wesley's application was different. Robert Muthiah, professor of practical theology writes, "Wesley went far beyond Luther in implementing the priesthood of all believers…Wesley's emphasis on lay involvement in ministry influenced the parachurch movements that began to emerge in the second half of the 19th century."[47] An example is the YMCA movement. Wesley's ideas spread to increased lay leadership in the church and led to the training of more laity to serve in ministerial roles. Wesley was a strong supporter of lay leadership in the church.

John Calvin, like Martin Luther, concurred. The priesthood of all believers suggested that every Christian was mandated to be a representative of Christ in his redemptive outreach to the world. All believers should seek to bring others into the church. It was a commission that sent us into the world to exercise a priestly ministry not

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[45] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 83.

[46] Hershel H. Hobbs, *You Are Chosen: The Priesthood of all Believers,* 28.

[47] Robert A Muthiah, *The Priesthood of All Believers in the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications. 2009), 21.

for ourselves but for others for the sake of Christ.[48] Theologian and journalist Timothy George wrote, "For Calvin, the priesthood of all believers was not only a spiritual privilege but a moral obligation and a personal vocation."[49] It was a responsibility of faith to respond to God's call to minister to others.

E.Y. Mullins of the Southern Baptist movement had a different view on the priesthood of all believers. While Mullins and Luther agreed on several points, they differed on others. They both agreed that: (1) a believer should have direct access to God without any human mediator; (2) an official ministry is Biblical and necessary; and (3) the importance of the role of pastors.[50] Mullins grounded his understanding on the competency of the soul.

> Each Christian has the capacity to hear from God directly without any human mediators. And since all Christians are equally competent, there is no logical reason that any person would be dependent on another person for help in getting to God. Therefore, all are priests. The priesthood of all believers...is but the expression of the soul's competency.[51]

Mullins emphasized individualism where Martin Luther focused on a more communal nature of the priesthood of believers. Other recent theologians advocated a more individualistic view of the priesthood of all believers, thus undermining the Christ-centered, Bible-centered, communal life in the church that Luther intended.

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[48] Timothy George, "The Priesthood of All Believers: Timothy George," First Things, accessed October 6, 2024, https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers, 2.

[49] Timothy George, "The Priesthood of All Believers: Timothy George," 2.

[50] Mark Rogers, "A Dangerous Idea?" 130.

[51] Mark Rogers, "A Dangerous Idea?" 128.

Priesthood of All Believers – Implications for Today

The priesthood of all believers continues to be a doctrine in the Lutheran, Methodist, and other protestant denominations today. While it is a privilege to serve God in this way, there was also a responsibility associated with it. A balance between privilege and responsibility existed. Often, there was a temptation to emphasize privilege and minimize responsibility. Through the baptismal covenant, new life was found in Christ. That life was one of mission and ministry for all members of the church's royal priesthood. These were a few, but certainly not all, of the implications for believers as they grow in their faith and ministry life.

All believers were equal in their spiritual life, but equality did not mean the same in function. I Corinthians 12 states: "But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted. If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body? But as it is, there are many parts but one body."[52] Christians needed to remember that they were one body in Christ, even if they had distinct roles and offices in ministry. Each role was important to the body of Christ. The church only matured when each part of the body worked properly. Every member of the church had a responsibility to participate in service to God. The ministry of the Word of God did not stop with the preacher or pastor. All believers represented Christ to one another and to the world.

Every person had a priestly role to play in building up the kingdom of God, each Christian offered prayers for others because they knew they had perfect access to God the Father through Christ's atoning work. It was the responsibility of the body of Christ to lift others in prayer for their salvation and to spur one another on to good deeds. Christians

[52] I Corinthians 12:18-20.

were to represent Christ to one another and to the world. If believers were to faithfully perform the priesthood of all believers in various contexts, then the privilege and responsibility had to be taken seriously in both religiously-free parts of the world as well as in the parts of the world where Christianity was prohibited. Fulfilling the responsibility of the priesthood of all believers helped believers to fulfill their baptismal calling seriously.[53]

If churches were to remain faithful to gospel, then the ministry must match the message. The pastoral office should be protected and supported so that those ordained into the work of ministry stayed on task and be supported in their call to preach the Word of God. Believers also understood that the work of ministry does not belong to the pastor alone. When every member took place in serviced to the body of Christ is when the church is built.

Martin Luther's reforming suggestions for the church were motivated by a desire for greater access to the church and the Word of God for the common believers. Practical theologian Shauna Hannan claimed, "Luther endorsed unmediated access to God in response to and recognition of God's initial and ongoing access to us."[54] Especially known for translating the Bible into the common language of the people, Luther facilitated access to the scriptures for personal interpretation. This extended beyond personal study to teaching others as well.

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[53] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 148.

[54] Shauna Hannan, "That All Might Proclaim: Continuing Luther's legacy of Access," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 56, no. 2 (June 1, 2017), doi:10.1111/dial.12320. 169.

According to Shauna Hannan, Martin Luther also supported lay access to the pulpit citing his invitation for Melanchthon to preach at the City Church in Wittenberg.[55] With a shortage of pastors in both the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Methodist Church in western Ohio and beyond, equipping laity to preach is one solution. The priesthood of all believers supported the creation of a culture that boldly claims preaching was a ministry of the whole congregation. While this may be a new thought for the local congregation, it is not a new idea. The United Methodist Church has used lay speakers for many years. More than thirty years ago, Episcopal Priest Barbara Brown Taylor proposed that "preaching is not something an ordained minister does for fifteen minutes on Sunday but the whole congregation does all week long; it is a way of approaching the world, and of gleaning God's presence there."[56] Sharing in the work of teaching and preaching was just one way that the believers at SonRise church could begin to participate in the priesthood of all believers. Equipping the baptized to preach was truly a calling.

As the believers at SonRise Church began to discern, recognize, and live into their roles in this new federated church community, the focus was on servanthood. The leadership empowered others to be in the forefront of the mission. Leadership roles responded to the mission and vision of the church and the creation and maintenance of unity within the community of believers.[57] In response, believers were needed and moved

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[55]Shauna Hannan, "That All Might Proclaim: Continuing Luther's legacy of Access," 170.

[56] Shauna Hannan, "That All Might Proclaim: Continuing Luther's legacy of Access," 171.

[57] Clifford Hill, and Monica Hill. "The Priesthood of All Believers," *International Congregational Journal* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 126–30. https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.ohiolink.edu:9100/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=109452044&site=ehost-live, 129.

from being observers to participants in the work of the church. Working toward this goal, the church began to see a change in their vision to display a strong missional element with a desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ in their everyday living and was open to the transforming power of God.

Through this transforming power of God, the church worked together and identified their mission and vision statements, as well as redefined who they were as a community of believers. The church rediscovered its unity and function as a flexible, dynamic, and Holy Spirit energized community. Central to the concept of the missional church was the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. With the priesthood of all believers as the foundation, this doctrine empowered the project team and the congregation to function missionally. God is at work in the world, and Christians are called to go out into the world, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to respond to God's call. It is the responsibility of both clergy and laity to fulfill the mission of the church. The gifts of both laity and clergy functioned together in a dynamic unity. A missional purpose for the church was identified. Timothy van Aarde explains:

> The calling to be missional does not mean that every Christian is to understand himself or herself as a missionary, but that every Christian has a missional calling and task. The people of God are to be a servant people, ministering actively but humbly according to their gifts in a world of alienation and pain.[58]

A common mission statement for a church was a first step toward understanding who the church was and how the church shall respond to God's calling in the future. As SonRise

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[58] van Aarde, Timothy A. 2017. "The missional church structure and the priesthood of all believers (Ephesians 4:7-16) in the light of the inward and outward function of the church." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1, http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https:// www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/missional-church-structure-priesthood-all/docview/1909590482/se-2, 7.

Church worked to build a unified culture of community, Martin Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was a foundation for that work. From there, a common mission statement became the cornerstone for the community of faith to move forward, in unity, toward creating a community of faith where everyone understood their role, privilege, and responsibility to share God's love with others.

So, what would happen if the priesthood of all believers was taken seriously in churches, workplaces, homes and in the world? Church planter Hank Voss responded by saying, "The answer is simple. The beauty of God will be revealed in the world. The beauty of God's kingdom will be unveiled."[59]

With little common understanding to begin, having a single focal point, the common mission and vision statement, the community developed a common allegiance to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The church that functioned together in unity with no sharp differentiations between clergy and laity, functioned in unity as a missional church. A dynamic unity was achieved through a common mission in the church.

[59] Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ,* 156.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Poet and artist, Khalil Gibran wrote, "We are limited not by our abilities, but by our vision."[1] This project addressed the need to create unity in a newly federated church by developing a vision that would expand, rather than limit the vision of the church. This strong, clear vision statement was essential for guiding the church's direction and purpose. In a newly federated church, it was important to have key leaders who were committed to the federation and stated mission and vision for the church. A well-crafted vision statement helped to clarify the church's core values and shaped the direction of worship, faith development activities, and outreach in the local area and beyond. Developing mission and vision statements involved answering key questions about the church's purpose and the call that God had on the lives of those in the church. The mission and vision statements informed the strategic action and future of the church. As the church desired to make a lasting impact on the community and the world, defining exciting mission and vision statement was vital to leading people's lives toward faith, hope, and transformation.

[1] Tal Bur, "We are limited not by our abilities, but by our vision." ElevateSociety.com, November 23, 2025, https://elevatesociety.com/we-are-limited-not-by/.uote by.

Mission and Vision Statements

Mission and vision statements both relate to an organization's purpose. Designing compelling mission and vision statements are critical to the success of any organization.[2] These statements are based on the values and purpose of a company. According to Levy, "a mission statement basically says who we are as a company and the vision statement says what we want to be in the future."[3] Many companies develop some kind of mission or vision statement to explain who they are and the purpose of their company.[4]

Mission statements define the company's purpose. It may include the brand identity, business culture, and what the company does or achieves. A mission statement defines the organization's reason for being in business and how it aims to serve the key stakeholders.[5] Customers, employees, and investors are the stakeholders who are most often the intended audience for a mission statement. Mission statements are often influenced by the values of the company or organization. According to Ken Gavranovic, mission statements are "often aspirational and designed to never be fully realized."[6] Mission statements align expectations between the management and those who make up the heart of the organization.[7]

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[2] The Roles of Mission, Vision, and Values." March 3, 2021. https://biz.libretexts.org/@go/page/24409.

[3] Piet Levy, "Mission vs. Vision," *Marketing News* 45, no. 2 (February 28, 2011): 10. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=60469867& site=bsi-live.

[4] Andy Stanley, *Making Visio Stick* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 2007), 3.

[5] "The Roles of Mission, Vision, and Values." https://biz.libretexts.org/@go/page/24409.

[6] Ken Gavranovic, "The Extraordinary Power of Mission, Vision, and Values Statements," *Leadership Excellence* 40, no 9 (September 2023): 1.

[7] Gavranovic, "The Extraordinary Power of Mission, Vision, and Values Statements," 1.

While mission statements should boldly define the purpose of an organization, it should not be so audacious that it cannot be supported by the organizational leadership. Mission statements should be supported at all levels in an organization. They do not simply define what the organization does. Rather, they should focus on the contribution the organization makes to a community.

Vision statements are a future-oriented declaration of the organization's purpose or aspirations. The vision statement defines what the company strives to be or aims to accomplish.[8] It can be considered a goal or road map to success and how success is achieved. Gavranovic indicates that "the vision statement gives a clear, specific, and compelling picture of what the organization will look like in one, two, or even five years down the road."[9] In simple terms, a mission statement lays out an organization's purpose for being and a vision statement indicates, based on the purpose, what the organization desires to become. A good vision statement taps into the emotions and should connect with the hopes and dreams of all stakeholders.[10] It should be inspirational. The strategic plan, or strategy for success, should flow directly from the vision statement, since the strategy is intended to achieve the defined vision within the parameters outlined in the mission statement. Mission statements tend to be longer than vision statements. They are inspirational, courageous, and they motivate employees forward toward their goals.

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[8] "The Roles of Mission, Vision, and Values." https://biz.libretexts.org/@go/page/24409.

[9] Gavranovic, "The Extraordinary Power of Mission, Vision, and Values Statements," 2.

[10] Mark Fenner, "Mission, Vision, Values: The Essential Foundation," *Leadership Excellence* 34 no. 10 (October 2017): 31.

Mission statements are often influenced by the values of the company or organization. Values, or principles as some call them, are the beliefs of an individual or group, in this case in the organization in which they are invested. They are the building blocks of the organizational culture.[11] While developing a mission statement, it may be helpful to identify the values or common principles held by the organization that guide the decision-making processes. The values provide boundaries or guidelines for decisions made by the organization and its individual representatives while in pursuit of its goals. Gavranovic suggests that "setting down your company values in print helps to create a kind of moral compass for the organization, your leaders and your employees."[12] Along with the mission and vision, the core values should be clearly communicated to the organization to maintain the integrity of the organization.

Mission and vision statements have several purposes for organizations. First, the mission statement should communicate the purpose of the organization to the stakeholders.[13] The better an employee understands an organization's purpose, the better they will be able to understand the implementation strategy and their part in the implementation. Well-developed mission and vision statements should be a catalyst for motivation and understanding among the stakeholders. Second, the mission statement should inform the development of the strategic plan.[14] Mission and vision statements

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[11] Fenner, "Mission, Vision, Values: The Essential Foundation, 31.

[12] Gavranovic, "The Extraordinary Power of Mission, Vision, and Values Statements," 2.

[13] "The Roles of Mission, Vision, and Values." 2021. March 3, 2021. https://biz.libretexts.org/@go/page/24409.

[14] "The Roles of Mission, Vision, and Values." 2021. March 3, 2021. https://biz.libretexts.org/@go/page/24409.

inform the creation of a strategy for success. The strategy, then, will fulfill the mission of the organization, moving it toward fulfillment of the vision. Vision statements also provide a bridge between the mission and strategy, creating a tension between them which creates an environment for innovation, creativity, and improvement. Third, the mission statement also should motivate staff to serve in an effective and productive role. For some organizations, especially non-profits, mission statements should motivate donors to care for and financially support the organization.[15] Finally, the mission and vision statements, along with the strategic plan, provide a guide for the identification of the measurable goals and objectives utilized to determine the success of the organization.[16] Tod Bolsinger, vice president of Fuller Theological Seminary, writes that the mission of a church takes precedence in decision-making:

> The focused, shared, missional purpose of the church or organization will trump every other competing value. It's more important than my preferences or personal desire. It is more critical than my leadership style, experience, or past success. It's the grid by which we evaluate every other element in the church. It's the criterion for determining how we will spend our money, who we will hire and fire, which ministries we will start and which ones we will shut down. It's the tiebreaker in every argument and the principle by which we evaluate every decision we make…The key question is: Does it further our mission? The mission trumps all.[17]

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[15] Linda K. Wallace, *Libraries, Mission, and Marketing: writing mission statements that work* (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2004), 4.

[16] "The Roles of Mission, Vision, and Values." 2021. March 3, 2021. https://biz.libretexts.org/@go/page/24409.

[17] Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 125.

The key to successful integration of the mission and vision into an organization is leadership. Pastor and author Andy Stanley writes, "It is the leadership's responsibility to ensure that people understand and embrace the vision of the organization."[18]

There are many ways to write a mission statement. Human resource consultant Bruce Mast recommends that companies should involve management, employees and even customer or vendor input.[19] While the input of top leaders is important, the input of the staff at all levels should be considered to produce buy-in from everyone. According to business owner Steve Yankee, there are four simple steps to writing a mission statement. These are: (1) write it in "down to earth, easily understandable terms"; (2) use it to remind yourself of excellence; (3) include the reward for reaching your goal; and (4) look at it every day and keep it in mind when you go about conducting your business.[20] A statement that is simple to understand and is read often will be easier for employees to remember and put into practice.

Business consultant Bradley Malone recommends the use of mission statements to provide a common foundation for decision-making within a company or organization. He writes, "A vision and mission is viable when it can be measured against the following criteria: (1) Can the organization credibly sell the vision and mission to its customers and regularly measure performance? (2) Does the organization use the vision and mission as a filter through which all decisions are made? (3) Does it continuously reward behavior

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[18] Stanley, *Making Vision Stick*, 17.

[19] Matthew J. Mowry, "Making a Statement," *Business NH Magazine* 29 no 1 (January 2012): 24. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN= 70235561& site=bsi-live.

[20] Steve Yankee, "Crafting Your Mission Statement in Four Easy Steps," *EventDV* 23, no. 4 (May 2010): 39. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true& db=buh&AN=50140862&site=bsi-live.

that aligns with the vision and mission and correct behavior that is not? (4) Does executive management really follow the mission and vision statements or are they hypocrites? (5) Does the vision and mission make people proud to work in the organization."[21] These are important questions to ask as they maintain the congruency between the mission and vision statements and the actual practices of the organization.

Peter Gow, a college administrator, highlights this for educational institutions explaining "for accreditation, there must be congruence between the schools stated mission and core values and its actual program, policies, planning, and decision-making at both the operational and governance levels."[22] While not all organizations have accreditation standards, this congruency is important for their successful operation as they provide guidelines by which to operate. Gow also warns against confusing the mission statement with a marketing tag line. While both are important to the success of an organization, they have different purposes and different audiences.[23] The language is different between the two. Library administrator and consultant Linda Wallace encourages writers to keep the statement short and succinct while avoiding organizational jargon or buzz words that may become quickly outdated.[24]

When writing a compelling mission and vision statement, it is a best practice to invite ideas from a variety of roles within the organization. While many may have

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[21] Bradley A. Malone, "Why You Need a Mission Statement?" *Sound & Video Contractor* 28, no. 7 (July 2010): 16–17. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=52768867 &site=bsi-live.

[22] Peter Gow, "What Should Mission Statements Do?" *Independent School,* 69, no 1 (Fall 2009):28. https://seach.ebscohost.com/longin.aspx?direct-true&db=a9h&AN=44747580&site =ehost-live.

[23] Gow, "What Should Mission Statements Do?" 28.

[24] Wallace, *Libraries, Mission, and Marketing: writing mission statements that work,* 14.

suggestions, not all suggestions should be included in the writing process. Next a work group composed of representatives from key areas needs to be created to review the suggestions, past mission statements, and other supporting documents. A facilitator should be enlisted to guide the working group through their discussions. The working group then should brainstorm key concepts to be included in the statement. Within the working group a person should be selected as the writer to draft the statement. Once drafted, the working group then can gather again to review and provide feedback. A second draft will be presented to the working group. The group will assess the statement with people from outside the group and even from outside the organization. A third draft will be developed and presented to key groups within the organization. A final draft then should be approved by the working group for presentation to the entire organization for approval.[25]

Wallace suggests a simplified process where one person, well ensconced in the environment, utilizes the suggestions and writes the statement and presents it for approval.[26] While this process is faster and more simplistic, it lacks the connection to the creative process that is sometimes required to garner the support needed for the statement. It is not based in the unifying work of a team.

Church planter Carey Nieuwhof suggests that a mission statement "provide a structure for decision-making, aligns the congregation's efforts, and creates a story that can encourage a growing church."[27] Nieuwhof makes an interesting suggestion that a

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[25] Wallace, *Libraries, Mission, and Marketing: writing mission statements that work,* 18.

[26] Wallace, *Libraries, Mission, and Marketing: writing mission statements that work,* 20.

[27] Carey Nieuwhof, "How to Create a New Mission Statement for Your Church," CareyNieuwhof.com, December 20, 2023. https://careynieuwhof.com/church-mission-statements, 4.

team first identify who embodies the organization's values. That is, identifying one or two persons who embody what the church is about and what the team wants the church to be like in the future.[28] Then, identify the characteristics of this person that stand out as values of the church. This may be an easier task than simply identifying values and brainstorming abstract ideas. The challenge with this approach is that the second step is to identify those who do not embody the church values. This can become an exercise in popularity or create ill-will within the congregation. Once characteristics are identified, then the actual writing of the statement can begin. It will need to be memorable, repeatable, and easy to understand so that it can be easily shared and understood by outsiders. As with other recommendations, the new statement will need to be reviewed and revised several times, with a variety of groups, until finalized.

Mission and vision statements, as well as values, should be widely shared throughout the organization so that their meaning is widely understood, shared, and adopted by the employees, customers, and investors. Communication is the key to successfully sharing and understanding the mission and vision statements.[29] People need to see the vision, identify with it, and know that leadership is serious about it to have a commitment from all the stakeholders. These statements should be communicated clearly, creatively, convincingly, and as much as possible to be reflected in every aspect of the organization. This may involve communicating that vision statement upward,

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[28] Carey Nieuwhof, "How to Create a New Mission Statement for Your Church," 4.

[29] "Crafting Mission and Vision Statements." 2021. March 3, 2021. https://biz.libretexts.org/@go/page/24413.

downward, across and outward.[30] Communicating upward involves relying on bottom-up innovation processes that encourage and empower middle-level managers to take ownership of mission and vision strategies. Communicating upward means that the vision must be internally communicated to top management by highlighting its feasibility. Communicating downward means gaining support from people who are needed to implement the mission and vision. Starting this process early results in early identification and addressing obstacles. Communicating across and outward requires cooperation from other units or groups within the organization and from key external stakeholders to gain support for the new mission and vision.

The mission, vision, and core values of an organization provide a template for everyone to follow to ensure that everyone is moving in the same direction to reach their goals. Mission and vision statements can sometimes be viewed cynically by members of an organization.[31] That is often due to the gaps between a company's words and their deeds.[32] A mission statement says one thing, while the manager may do the complete opposite. In these cases, management must lead by example by being the first in the organization to live the mission. If a company is not willing to live up to its mission statement, then it would be better not to have one.[33]

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[30] "Crafting Mission and Vision Statements." 2021. March 3, 2021. https://biz.libretexts.org/@go/page/24413

[31] "Crafting Mission and Vision Statements." 2021. March 3, 2021. https://biz.libretexts.org/@go/page/24413.

[32] "Crafting Mission and Vision Statements." 2021. March 3, 2021. https://biz.libretexts.org/@go/page/24413.

[33] Wallace, *Libraries, Mission, and Marketing: writing mission statements that work,* 25.

Once finalized, mission statements should be clearly articulated to the organization. Wallace writes, "Handsomely framing and displaying your mission is a sign of pride and openness to accountability."[34] Publishing your mission statement is the first step toward understanding and valuing the organization. Team-building consultant Deborah Mackin encourages "all employees to accept responsibility for themselves and their teams" when articulating a new mission and vision into an organizational culture.[35] All employees also should be valued for their contribution to the success of the organization. This requires all employees to remain flexible and readily adapt to change. Bolsinger says that "The leader in the system is committed to the mission when no one else is."[36] This requires clear commitment to the mission and vision on the part of the leadership. The more the leader is committed to the mission, the more it will be accepted by the rest, and the more likely the organization will be able to work through the resistance that follows when making difficult decisions.

Ultimately, the mission and vision must be celebrated. A celebration launch event to promote the new statements will give greater importance and credence to the statements, while reinforcing the importance of the new mission and vision statements. When success is celebrated, it is sought after again and again. So, celebrations are opportunities to clarify and reinforce the forward movement of the organization. Stanley writes, "what is celebrated is repeated." Whether it is behaviors, decisions, or values, they will be repeated if they are celebrated.

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[34] Wallace, *Libraries, Mission, and Marketing: writing mission statements that work,* 25.

[35] Deborah Mackin, *The Team-Building Took Kit* (New York, NY: AMACOM, 2007), 182.

[36] Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory,* 131.

Taking time to develop the mission, vision, and values provides a guideline for everyone in the organization. When behaviors respond to the mission, and reflect the values, it empowers the organization and everyone in it to reach their potential. According to Fenner, "these are all critical elements in fostering a culture of success."[37] For a successful organization, mission, vision, and goals are more than words on a poster; they are a way of business. They define what matters and how the team must respond.

Management Professor Harsh Verma surmised that "a job, unless infused with higher order relevance, remains a chore. But when a higher order connect is developed, the job becomes an opportunity, a reward, and a gift."[38] To document this, he conducted a study concerning mission statements to evaluate whether mission statements are effective in motivating employees by providing direction, focus, and meaning to the work. The study found that a high emphasis placed on worker satisfaction is a key to customer satisfaction. Emotional buy-in from the employee had a positive influence on work ethic behavior and high quality was a driver in performance, productivity, and profitability for the company. Specifically, "more than eighty percent of the respondents indeed felt good about company missions and like to work enthusiastically for them."[39] He further concluded that, "Missions would have little value if they do not guide thinking and behavior of people. In this regard the study discovered that more than eighty percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statements measuring the influence of

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[37] Fenner, "Mission, Vision, Values: The Essential Foundation, 31.

[38] Harsh V. Verma, "Mission Statements-a Study of Intent and Influence," *Journal of Services Research* 9, no. 2 (October 2009): 153. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=45341945&site=bsi-live.

[39] Verma, "Mission Statements-a Study of Intent and Influence," 169.

missions on individual's thinking, missions acting as a point of reference."[40] Additionally, the study showed that respondents felt leaders and managers who live by the stated values and the long-term plans are consistent with the mission of the business.[41] He concluded suggesting that a clearly worded and lived-through mission can be a "powerful device in influencing decision making across the system."[42]

In another study, management professors, Christopher K. Bart, Nick Bontis, and Simon Taggar undertook a study concerning the impact of mission statements on firm performance. Eighty-three companies participated in the study. They were given a lengthy questionnaire and provided some of their key operating statistics. While previous studies demonstrated a strong and robust association between mission organizational alignment and employee behavior, the results in this study suggest that "while the degree of mission organizational alignment continues to positively influence employee behavior, there may be other variables/constructs which are more important than those considered in this study."[43] In fact, Bart suggests that the more employees are satisfied with their company's mission statements, the more they will be personally committed to it.[44] Employee commitment to a mission statement has more effect on motivation than it has on satisfaction with the statement. The influence of the mission statement over

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[40] Verma, "Mission Statements-a Study of Intent and Influence," 169.

[41] Verma, "Mission Statements-a Study of Intent and Influence," 170.

[42] Verma, "Mission Statements-a Study of Intent and Influence," 171.

[43] Christopher K. Bart, Nick Bontis, and Simon Taggar, "A Model of the Impact of Mission Statements on Firm Performance," *Management Decision* 39, no. 1 (February 1, 2001): 31. https://doi.org/10.1108/eum0000000005404.

[44] Bart, Bontis, and Taggar, "A Model of the Impact of Mission Statements on Firm Performance," 31.

employee's behavior has a larger influence than their commitment or satisfaction. Bart concludes that mission statements do matter. They do have a positive impact on performance, and they make a positive contribution toward it. However, mission statements must have the proper rationale, contain sound content, and have organizational alignment to bring about sufficient behavioral change.

A mission statement is a managerial tool which has the power of directing the behavior in a company; the ultimate test of a mission statement is its ability to influence behavior. Bart concludes that an "organizational member will obey and follow the dictates of the mission only to the extent that they are committed to it."[45] There is a significant and positive relationship between a mission's influence over members' behavior and the three performance measures of mission satisfaction, stakeholder involvement and organizational alignment.[46]

Mission and vision both relate to an organization's purpose and aspirations and are typically communicated in the form of brief written statements. A mission statement for an organization communicates the reason for being and it aspires to serve the key stakeholders. The vision statement is a narrower future-oriented declaration of the organization's purpose and aspirations. Together, mission and vision guide strategic development, help communicate the organization's purpose and inform the goals and objectives utilized to measure the success of the organization. To increase the influence of mission statements, Bart recommends that leaders involve a greater variety of

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[45] Christopher K. Bart, "Sex, Lies, and Mission Statements," *Business Horizons* 40, no. 6 (November 1997): 17. doi:10.1016/S0007-6813(97)90062-8.

[46] Bart, "Sex, Lies, and Mission Statements," 17.

stakeholders and organize the structure of the organization to align with the mission.[47] High quality statements that are well publicized throughout an organization and developed by representatives at all levels have a greater impact on the organization. Bart says that "to the extent that they are used wisely, any firm can derive great benefit from them, both emotional and financial."[48]

Churches and Mission Statements

Writing a mission statement for a church is similar to writing one for any other organization. Nieuwhof writes that, "Not having a mission statement can be a problem. And that's because almost everyone in your church has their own idea of what the church is about. That's why developing clear, concise, and compelling mission, vision, and value statements matter so much."[49] A church with clear mission and vision statements keep the congregation focused and lay the foundation for common understanding of the purpose. It reduces the perception that everyone is moving in different or competing directions.

The church, like any other organization, should be missional, and should start with a clear understanding of that mission. Church consultant Rev. John Kaiser writes,

> If the congregation were a public corporation, we would look to its members or their representatives to define the purpose of the enterprise because as shareholders, they would be the owners. If the congregation were a small Mom and Pop business, we would look to the family matriarch and patriarch to define the purpose because as sole proprietors, they would be the owners…we know theologically that the Church is now owned by its member or by a dominant family among its members.[50]

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[47] Bart, "Sex, Lies, and Mission Statements," 17.

[48] Bart, "Sex, Lies, and Mission Statements," 17.

[49] Carey Nieuwhof, "How to Create a New Mission Statement for Your Church."

[50] John Edmund Kaiser, *Winning on Purpose: How to Organize Congregations to Succeed in Their Mission* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 52.

According to the Bible, in Colossians 1:18, Jesus Christ is the head of the church. Therefore, drafting a mission statement, churches must look to the words of Jesus Christ for direction. In a sense then, Jesus Christ is the owner of the church and all its expressions. Members do not get to dream up the mission for their congregation, rather, Jesus, who has all authority in heaven and earth, should be the first in directing the path. "Defining the mission of our congregation is not an exercise in creativity but an exercise in discernment."[51] Therefore, Kaiser recommends that the mission statement for a church should focus on the final instructions given by Jesus, in Matthew 28:19-20 which reads:

> "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."[52]

The primary mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Church administrator Rev. Gustov Nelson hypothesizes that the church has a primary and secondary mission. Agreeing with Kaiser, Nelson writes the primary mission is "the building of the kingdom of God on earth through the activities we do in the world."[53] Through this, Nelson highlights the primary purpose of all Christian churches. The responsibility for this mission includes both the clergy and lay members of the congregation and highlights the application of the priesthood of all believers. The secondary mission is what the local church does together. These activities may include

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[51] Kaiser, *Winning on Purpose: How to Organize Congregations to Succeed in Their Mission,* 52.

[52] Matthew 29:19-20

[53] Gustov Nelson, *Service is the Point: Members as Ministers to the World* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 2000), 100.

worship, support for one another, providing funding for the church budget, and work for justice. While this statement may be true, more clarification is needed to encourage and motivate church members to move forward as a unified church body.

The context for this project was SonRise Church, a federated church of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the United Methodist Church (UMC). When the primary and secondary missions in a federated church were considered, it was asserted that the mission statements of both denominations were foundational for this context and were introduced to the congregation as a basis for their mission statement development. The churchwide mission of the ELCA was, "doing God's work in the world and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ."[54] The vision of the ELCA was, "A world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation."[55] This vision called followers to share the gospel for the sake of the world. Followers of Christ were prompted to love as God loves. Through this love God changed the world through God's followers.

The mission of the UMC church was "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches and extension ministries of the Church provided the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs."[56] The UMC Book of Discipline further explained, "the fulfillment of God's reign and realm in the world were the vision Scripture holds before us."[57] For both the ELCA and UMC

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[54] "Vision and Purpose," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed November 20, 2024, https://www.elca.org/about/vision-and-purpose.

[55] "Vision and Purpose," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, https://www.elca.org/about/vision-and-purpose

[56] "Mission Statement of the United Methodist Church," The United Methodist Church, December 18, 2008, https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-120-ff-section-1-the-churches.

churches, God's mission was to be the priority in the world. Their individual mission statements witnessed to this as they demonstrated the priority of the scripture, service to God, and transformation of the world.

As SonRise Church worked to identify core values on which to build their work, the core values of their denominations were helpful as a starting point. The ELCA core values were forgiveness and reconciliation; dignity, compassion, and justice; inclusion and diversity; courage and openness to change; and faithful stewardship of God's creation and gifts.[58] The UMC core values were proclaiming the gospel; leading persons to commit their lives to God; nurturing persons in Christian living; sending persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ; and continuing the mission of seeking, welcoming and gathering persons into the community of the body of Christ.[59] These were all the starting points for SonRise Church to explore, identify, and write their mission and vision statements.

The ELCA recommended a three-step process in developing a mission statement for the church. These were: (1) developing congregational identity: who are we as God's people; (2) developing congregational mission: what are we about as God's people; and (3) moving from mission to action: using the statement in planning.[60] Each of these steps

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[57] "Mission Statement of the United Methodist Church," https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-120-ff-section-1-the-churches.

[58] Vision and Purpose," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, https://www.elca.org/about/vision-and-purpose.

[59] "Mission Statement of the United Methodist Church," https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-120-ff-section-1-the-churches.

[60] Manual for congregational mission planning, accessed November 20, 2024, https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Manual_For_Congregational_Mission_Planning.pdf.

included a biblical and theological basis as well as an opportunity for a brief evaluation after each step.

Conclusion

At SonRise Church, the first step in developing a congregational identity included brainstorming with a representative group within the church to arrive at a mutual understanding of who the church was. It also included a presentation about the individual churches that unified, including the local church histories and a comparison of denominational beliefs. Developing a congregational identity entailed a similar brainstorming process to determine who the members of the federated church wanted to be as a church. Finally, moving from mission to action included finalizing the mission and vision statements, unveiling these statements to the congregation, ensuring the statements were in line with the church's new constitution, and publishing the statements so that they were visible to the congregation.

The participants for this project included key leaders from the church's administrative team and from the staff parish relations committee. While these two committees would have provided enough participants for the project, other church members were invited to attend the brainstorming meetings to facilitate a breadth of input. In addition to participation in the brainstorming sessions, the church associates were asked to respond to pre- and post-project surveys assessing their attitudes and observations toward the church community and community feeling of purpose in the church. Church context associates reviewed the question sets, provided input, and

reviewed analysis before it was presented to the congregation. Follow-up interviews were conducted for clarification.

While unification of the church body with one common mission and vision statement and consensus on core values was the goal, diversity in the current church community could not be ignored. This newly federated church was comprised of people from three previous churches and two different denominations. While the desire was to be unified under the common mission and vision, and to reach all people with the gospel, the church respected and embraced the diversity that arose in the local church. After the merger, one way the community saw and experienced the unity of the church was through the activities of the members. The church displayed a unity of the spirit. Jesus prayed for this type of unity within his original twelve disciples and for the disciples of today. In John 17, Jesus said:

> My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.[61]

Disunity weakened the integrity of the church.[62] Unity in the body of Christ was crucial to their success. This unity was not just absence of conflict; rather, it included acceptance of one another, openness to new ideas and opportunities, the embracing of one another,

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[61] John 17:20-23.

[62] Craig Ott, *The Church on Mission: A Biblical Vision for Transformation among All People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 86.

and overcoming barriers of differences between one another.[63] The church worked to find ways to celebrate its diversity, while demonstrating unity of mission, vision, and spirit.

As SonRise Church worked to build a unified culture of community, it was important that leadership included all those roles needed for a unified approach to both a mission and vision. A diverse leadership team supporting a common mission was the cornerstone for the community to move forward in unity, and created a community of faith where everyone had a role and a responsibility to share God's love with others. Clear mission and vision statements helped to unify the church and moved it forward in service to God.

[63] Ott, *The Church on Mission: A Biblical Vision for Transformation among All People,* 87.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The previous chapters provided a foundation of biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary support for the project. The problem was that the members of SonRise Church lacked a unified approach to ministry and service to their neighbors. At times, their ideas even conflicted. The intended goal of this project was to unify the newly merged congregation to have an increased sense of community and a renewed focus for long-term ministry.

SonRise Church officially merged and became a federated church by a unanimous vote of the congregation at their annual meeting on December 1, 2023. While this was a historical moment in the life of the church, it was not a silver-bullet solution to unify an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregation with two United Methodist Church (UMC) congregations. It still required work creating unity within the newly formed congregation. The hypothesis for this project was: "In a newly merged and federated congregation, if we develop a common mission and vision statement for the church, members will have an increased sense of community and a renewed and unified purpose for long-term ministry." As the mission and vision statements were created for SonRise Church, it was helpful to know the mission and vision statements for each of the parent denominations.

The churchwide mission of the ELCA was: "Doing God's work in the world and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ."[1] The vision statement of the ELCA was: "A world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation."[2] The ELCA's stated purpose was to "activate each of us so more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love."[3] Similarly, the mission of the UMC was "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."[4] Further, the UMC's Book of Discipline explains that this was accomplished "by proclaiming the good news of God's grace and by exemplifying Jesus' command to love God and neighbor, thus seeking the fulfillment of God's reign and realm in the world."[5]

The recent church merger and new federation created a need for unity and direction for SonRise Church. With these statements as the backdrop for this work, SonRise Church developed and implemented mission and vision statements from the grassroots level, and they identified core values for the new ministries of the church. According to Thomas McElheny, a church mission statement is "…an essential part of your ministry. It defines your church's very purpose."[6] McElheny said that a mission

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[1] "Churchwide Organization," ELCA.org. https://elca.org/About/Churchwide.

[2] "Vision and Purpose," ELCA.org, https://elca.org/About/Vision-and-Purpose.

[3] "Vision and Purpose," ELCA.org, https://elca.org/About/Vision-and-Purpose.

[4] "Mission Statement of the United Methodist Church," The United Methodist Church, December 18, 2008, https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-120-ff-section-1-the-churches.

[5] "Mission Statement of the United Methodist Church," The United Methodist Church, December 18, 2008, https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-120-ff-section-1-the-churches.

[6] McElheny, Thomas. "Tips for Writing a Church Mission Statement." ChurchPlaza, June 17, 2024. https://www.churchplaza.com/writing-a-mission-statement-for-your-church, 1.

statement could unify a congregation by providing a clear vision, fostering a sense of unity, and motivating members to participate and contribute.[7]

The project context was SonRise Church, a small rural church located in Ithaca, Ohio. The location in Darke County is a rural farming community, including both family farms and corporate farms. This area has rich, healthy soil that lends itself to highly productive annual yields. Ithaca, Ohio, is a small town of approximately forty-four households.[8] The SonRise congregation is a federation of the UMC and ELCA. These congregations, two United Methodist and one Lutheran, joined together for convenience and survival. At the heart of SonRise Church is their love of their neighbor and common desire to focus on missions to serve others. The federation became official on December 1, 2023. I was appointed to SonRise Church for the expressed purpose of finalizing the federation paperwork, including the congregational constitution, and to develop policies and procedures that comply with both parent denominations. Upon completion of the constitution, it became evident that a congregation needs more than a constitution to develop a unified church family. It needed direction, so I suggested a group of ministry leaders work together to develop a common mission and vision for the new church.

This project used a process like appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry is a "collaborative process that explores, identifies, and enhances the best of 'what is' in organizations intending to create a better future."[9] This process included a SOAR

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[7] Thomas McElheny. "Tips for Writing a Church Mission Statement," 2.

[8] *Ithaca, OH*. Data USA. (n.d.-a). https://embed.datausa.io/profile/geo/ithaca-oh

[9] Hyerim Cho and Alexandre Ardichvili. "Appreciative Inquiry: An Integrative Review of Studies in Three Disciplines," *Human Resource Development Review*, 23, no. 3, (2024): 378, https://doi.org/10.1177/15344843241256156.

analysis to specifically name: (1) strengths; (2) opportunities; (3) aspirations; and (4) desired results of the church. SOAR analysis is used to help organizations align their strategies with their strength or core competencies, while focusing on strengths and positive aspects to drive change and growth. This analysis was used to identify the strengths of the church, determine what worked well and maximize those strengths.

The biblical support for this project focused on Ephesians 4:1-16. The letter to the Ephesians reflects on God's desire for the church and God's plan for the world. Its purpose was to expound on the blessings enjoyed by the church, to stress the unity of the body of Christ, and to encourage believers in the ways of Christ. Christian unity, as described in Ephesians 4:1-16, provided a biblical basis for the development of a common mission at SonRise Church and created unity in the body that will move the church forward together as a stronger, more unified body.

According to Christian educator and author Frank Gaebelein, conventional religious thought declined in the first century. This decline left room for a variety of pagan religious groups to develop. Therefore, an interest in building unity among the people began to grow.[10] The letter to the Ephesians called followers to have a unity that could be found in Christ. In this self-promoting world, Ephesians calls Christians to lead instead with love. Gaebelein supports this, saying, "God's ultimate purpose is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."[11] In other words, we are called together in unity to be one body.

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[10] Frank E Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible. Vol 11; Ephesians-Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 14.

[11] Gaebelein, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 14.

This unity that Paul called for is not uniformity; rather, it is a call to a common purpose that stems from unity in the common belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to be a part of this unity, which was required to be a spiritually effective church. Paul's appealed to all believers to live in a way that expressed a new creation in unity, and respected the differences in beliefs, lifestyle, and theology. This unity looked to common understandings that led to mature faith in Christ.

In the case of SonRise Church, the goal for unity was with the two long-standing churches that stem from two different historically reformational denominations, the aforementioned United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The exhortation of Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians "to bear together in love" helped to address the need for unity in newly federated or merged congregations of the past. As SonRise Church developed a new mission statement at the grassroots level, and moved into a new vision, the goal was to become a more cohesive unit so that these congregations worked together to meld and consolidate their different approaches to ministry. Their new statement included aspects of each church that were acceptable to all and would advance the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. It was the goal of this project that a mutual understanding would help to develop unity within the local congregation.

Historical figure Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf was an early proponent of ecumenical partnerships and unity among Christians. His work served as a basis for the emerging ministry and mission at SonRise Church. Count Zinzendorf was a transformative influence in the 18th century. Born a high-ranking noble, he set aside his privilege to serve Jesus Christ. Count Zinzendorf's life demonstrated the importance of

ecumenical relationships. He was a Lutheran noble, who held deep pietist roots. In addition to being a Lutheran clergyperson, he was also considered a Moravian bishop, and held connections to the Evangelical Revival, the Anglican Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. He worked to reconcile the contrasting traditions of the various doctrines in order to strengthen the community around the goal to increase Christ's kingdom.

Count Zinzendorf learned a great deal through these ecumenical experiences and formulated a personal theology that reflected his fascination in ecumenism. The unified church community was based on a shared experience and deep understanding of Jesus Christ, who led the community in the traditions of the church. The unifying bond of heart-piety, or the love of the savior, was central to his approach to ecumenism. He considered the heart to be the source of religious knowledge. This heart-piety was not a feeling or emotion; it was a deep internal knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior.

The goal of the new mission and vision statements developed by SonRise Church was to create a more cohesive team so that they may work together in unity to build up the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. It was also designed so that the community would grow in their personal faith and mature in their relationship with Christ. The understanding of Count Zinzendorf's theology served as a basis for the emerging mission at SonRise Church in that it helped the congregation focus on the things that united them instead of the things that divided them.

Reformer Martin Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers proclaimed that those who have a common faith in Christ also share in the Christ's royal priesthood. The basis for this understanding was that every believer has equal access to [God]

through Jesus without a human mediator.[12] Every believer also had the responsibility to exercise their priesthood. While not everyone was called to teach or preach the word of God, all were called by God to do something that will ultimately build upon their faith and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

For Luther, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers meant that everyone who was baptized and had faith in Christ was designated a priest and shared in Christ's royal priesthood. Author and historian Rachel Ciano explains, "This meant that every believer has equal access to the Father through Jesus. The corollary is that every believer has the responsibility to function as a priest to other believers, to minister to them, particularly through proclaiming Scripture to them."[13]

The new mission and vision statements were the catalyst for the work done by the believers at SonRise Church. As congregational members considered their roles in this new federated church community, the focus was on servanthood. Those holding leadership roles responded to the mission and vision of the church and worked to find common ground and a common goal, with the community of believers moving from being observers to participants in the work of the church. Working toward this goal, the church experienced an increased missional element of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in their everyday lives. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers served as a foundation to empower the SonRise Church congregation to function missionally with clergy, and working together to define and fulfill the mission of the church.

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[12] Rachel Ciano, "Luther's Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers: The Importance for Today." *Credo Magazine.* January 8, 2020, 2.

[13] Rachel Ciano, "Luther's Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers," 1.

Interdisciplinary support for this project included designing compelling mission and vision statements for businesses. Designing compelling mission and vision statements were critical to the success of any organization. Strong, clear, church mission and vision statements are essential for guiding the church's purpose. These new statements clarified the church's core values and shaped the direction of worship, faith development activities, and outreach in the local area and beyond. Developing mission and vision statements involved answering key questions about the church's purpose and the call that God has on the lives of those in the church. The mission and vision statements informed the strategic action and future of the church. An exciting vision and mission were key in leading people's lives toward faith, hope, and transformation for SonRise Church as the members made a lasting impact on the community and the world. The unified culture around the mission and vision of SonRise Church involved everyone. A diverse leadership team that supported a common mission was the cornerstone for the community of faith to move forward.

The biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundational research that undergirds this work focused on the community. In the church community, everyone had a responsibility to build the kingdom of God. Together, the church community focused on their mission and vision.

The following is a description of the project, "Loving as One: Creating a Missional Community in a Newly Federated Church." It includes a review of the methodology, implementation, analysis of data, and a summary of learnings. Considerations for further research and applications are also considered.

Methodology

The purpose of this project was to develop and implement common mission and vision statements for SonRise Church, and to define key values for the church so that the newly developed congregation could move forward in unity as they reached out to serve the community. There were three general steps used to create and implement the newly drafted mission and vision statements: (1) developing a congregational identity; (2) developing a congregational mission; and (3) moving from mission to action. The process of developing a congregational identity included brainstorming with a small representative group of leaders within the church to arrive at a common understanding of who they were as a church. It also included a historical overview of the individual churches, each church's history, and a comparison of denominational beliefs. Developing a congregational identity entailed a similar brainstorming process to determine who they wanted to be as a church. Finally, moving from mission to action included finalizing the mission and vision statements, unveiling these statements to the congregation, ensuring the statements were in line with the church's new constitution, and publishing them so that they will stay visible to the congregation.

This project was conducted over seven weeks with participants meeting on six consecutive Wednesday evenings in the church fellowship hall. There were eight participants. Of the eight participants, six attended all six sessions. The two who missed a session were given an opportunity to catch up on a Sunday morning after worship. One participant attended the final session via Zoom because she was called out of town. Refreshments were served at each meeting. The participant length of membership in the church ranged from three years to approximately sixty-five years. The denominational

background of the participants was 40% Lutheran and 60% Methodist. The original church membership was 40% St. Matthews Lutheran, 25% Grace Methodist, 12% from Gordon Methodist and 25% from the newly merged SonRise church.

The participants for this project included key leaders from the church leadership team and the staff parish relations committee. While these two committees provided enough participants for the project, other key church members were also invited to attend the brainstorming meetings to facilitate a breadth of input. All the participants appeared to be deeply committed to the success of the newly merged and federated church, its ministries, and they expressed a desire to see the church grow and flourish.

The project data collection included pre- and post-project questionnaires, brainstorming, group discussion, and personal interviews. Data was collected over six weeks in August and September 2025. The data was primarily qualitative and sought to measure changes in understanding of the unity experienced by the congregation.

In addition to participating in the brainstorming sessions, the church associates were also asked to respond to pre- and post-project surveys assessing their attitudes and observations toward the church community and community feeling of purpose in the church to facilitate data collection. Follow-up interviews were conducted with each participant for clarification on responses and to determine if there was any additional input they wanted to share.

Implementation

The project centered on a six-week series of workshops, with focused individual interviews in the following two weeks. In the beginning of July 2025, a letter of

invitation was sent to thirty-four active leaders. They were members of the church congregational council, the staff parish leadership team, and other key leaders. They were invited to participate in a series of workshops designed to develop mission and vision statements for SonRise Church. Eight people chose to participate in the project. I facilitated the meetings. My original goal was to include six to twelve participants; therefore, eight participants were within the range of this goal. The participants were given folders at the first meeting, which contained note paper and other handouts. They kept these folders with them throughout the project and retained them afterward. These packets included an outline of topics discussed each week, matching pens, note paper, sticky notes, and identical adhesive dots to preserve anonymity and were used in subsequent weeks. Each meeting began with prayer, and then a teaching session based on the foundational work for the project. Following a break, the meeting resumed with a brainstorming session around a particular topic.

In the first meeting, a context expert verified that each person had completed an informed consent form. I reviewed the expectations and passed out the pre-project questionnaire. The questionnaires were collected and numbered by the context associate to allow for anonymity of the comments. We then did an icebreaker, unscrambling Bible verses to build rapport. I presented a history of the churches involved in the federation and highlighted significant dates on color-coded sticky notes. The colors were specific to each original church. The sticky notes were then used to build a timeline of events from the planting of each church to the present day. The first week, our brainstorming focused on our observations of the timeline. It was interesting to see how the significant events in each of the churches involved in the merger and federation had similar experiences at

similar times in history. We brainstormed some political and cultural events that occurred at those times and soon observed a connection between economic and social milestones and the responses of each church. The timeline remained posted throughout the course of the project and was referred to at least once during each workshop meeting.

The second meeting began with a review of the work we had completed the previous week and then moved into the presentation of the biblical basis for the project from the Letter to the Ephesians. It was followed by brainstorming responses to several questions, all of which focused on defining who they were as a church. Sticky dots were used this week and in subsequent weeks for identification of the most prevalent thoughts.

The third meeting began with a teaching session based on the theological foundation of the priesthood of all believers and a discussion on how that was reflected in the life of SonRise Church. The participants were then divided into pairs. Each pair was assigned a section of the full-communion agreement, "Confessing our Life Together," which was developed over several years and finalized in 2009. Each pair read the assigned section and reported back on how the ELCA and UMC were the same, how they were different, and how each member experienced it at SonRise Church. The sections included: Triune God and authority; salvation by grace through faith; sacraments; church and its ministries; and finally, the world and our common ministries. Following a break, the group brainstormed around the question: How could we better serve God and our neighbors?

The fourth week began with a teaching session based on the historical foundation for this project. The historical figure was Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Count Zizendorf's ecumenical interests served as a foundation for the ecumenical federation of

SonRise Church. Following a break, the group again brainstormed how they could better serve God and their neighbor and focused more on the opportunities they had to serve their community and reach out in love. Then comparisons were drawn to illustrate how SonRise was different than other churches in the area. Finally, the discussion was redirected toward who they aspired to be as a church and how these goals could be reached. This provided the opportunity to daydream about the future of the local church community.

In our fifth meeting we began with a review of our previous learnings and brainstorming sessions. I then presented a learning session about the interdisciplinary foundation for the project, which was about building mission statements for businesses. I also presented the mission statements and the core values for both the ELCA and UMC churches. We brainstormed the core values of SonRise Church and identified specific core values based on what is currently done. More time was spent discussing their aspirations as a church, identifying those that are most important to this congregation and exploring how to reach those goals.

In our sixth and final group meeting, we began by reviewing the work that we completed in the first five sessions. I reminded the group of the results of our previous brainstorming sessions, and shared several options for mission and vision statements, which sparked thoughts, ideas, and discussions. Several revisions were made. The mission and vision statements were finalized. Next, they reviewed the list of values that rose to the surface through our brainstorming process. The project team narrowed the core values to four. Each member of the project team proposed potential scripture verses to be considered as a theme verse to support the mission and vision statements. John

13:34 was selected because it encompasses the theme of "love your neighbor" and includes the words of Jesus. Following a break, the project team discussed the best way to introduce new mission and vision statements to the congregation. There was consensus that the new mission and vision statements should be introduced at the charge conference/annual meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to review the previous year and set goals for the next year. Following the initial introduction, the mission and vision statements were shared in worship, printed in the bulletin and newsletter, and were posted in key places in the church. I shared my appreciation of the work the group had done and distributed the post-project questionnaire.

The next week, I met with each member of the project team individually to ask for input on the process, the results and to see if they had any additional thoughts to share. Overall, the new mission and vision statements were well received, and the project team was excited to share them. The mission and vision were introduced at the fall charge conference/annual meeting in early November by a member of the project team. At this meeting most of the church leaders were present and many members of the congregation would be present as well. The presenter highlighted that the mission and vision statements were a product of the group work and not the pastor. The team member explained the process and revealed the new mission statement, vision statement, core values, and supporting scripture verse. Colorful posters were given out to those in attendance. The congregation had no additional questions about the process or the mission statement. I reemphasized that the work was done by congregational members. As the project leader, and pastor, my role was simply to guide the process of discovery.

Summary of Learning

The hypothesis of this project stated that in a newly merged and federated congregation, if members developed a common mission and vision statement for the church, they would have an increased sense of community and a renewed and unified purpose for long-term ministry. The project was designed as a solution to the problem of three churches coming together without a clear purpose aside from survival. As Brad Aycock, Director of Fresh Expressions and New Beginnings for the West Ohio Conference told me, "Three unhealthy churches coming together do not create a healthy church."[14] Therefore, it was my hypothesis that a common mission would better prepare the church to move forward in ministry.

In their pre-project questionnaire, several participants confirmed the need for a mission of the church, stating that "we are not seeing any growth" and "many people do not see the importance of church worship and service work." Others were concerned that the project would not lead to success because "we will not do what God is leading us to do," or that the congregation as a whole would not respond stating, "At my work the mission statement was teamwork; I always wondered if anyone explained that to the team."

The hypothesis was confirmed in the post-project questionnaire by participants who stated, "I feel much better about the unity of the church," and "I notice [unity] more now after this project," and "I am excited about the mission, vision, and Bible verse we have chosen" to direct their work. The majority of the participants felt encouraged to

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[14] Brad Aycock, Executive Director of Fresh Starts & New Beginnings. West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church, interview by author, Columbus, OH, September 12, 2023.

make a difference in the church and the community. One participant stated, “I want the church members to know who we are. I think starting here will roll the ball into making a difference in the community.” The project team had a feeling of accomplishment at the completion of the project meetings.

Pre- and Post-Project Questionnaires

Most of the questions on the pre- and post-project questionnaires were designed to gauge participant perceptions around their personal feelings of unity and community within the church as well as measure their insights around the community commitment to the church.

The first question of the pre- and post-project questionnaire asked participants to describe their personal feeling of unity within the church and any changes that may have resulted from their experience. Overall, participants expressed an increased personal commitment to the church and an increased feeling of unity after the project. Participants stated that it broadened their insights into how unity means working together for a kingdom purpose rather than uniformity in beliefs.

In another question, participants were asked to share how hopeful they were about the future of the church. For the most part, participants indicated an increased sense of hope for the future of the church. One participant said, “I am very hopeful. I am excited about the mission, vision, and the Bible verse we have chosen” to serve as the Biblical focus verse. Another shared that they were hopeful and indicated a need to continue that through outreach work of the church. While outreach was not the focus of this project, the topic did arise several times in the group discussions. As in many congregations,

leaders are concerned about the future of the local church as well as the building of the body of Christ. Several people suggested that the church should focus more on sharing God's love in the community and beyond. While I did not want to ignore this topic completely, because it was an open door to discuss our current practices, I also did not want to deviate too much from the topic of mission and vision. Therefore, I allowed the conversation to continue for a time and emphasized the importance of relationship building in the community.

The questionnaire also asked about personal commitment to making a difference in the church and community, asking for personal examples of how they would follow up to make a difference. While some of the answers focused on things the church was already doing, such as serving in the food pantry, praying for members, and supporting a local Christian education program for children, another focused on partnering with other churches in the community to make a difference for the kingdom of God. It was suggested that the church work to increase visibility in the community, including participating in or supporting community activities, sharing encouragement, and giving hope to their immediate neighbors through personal support.

Another question asked about a participant's level of understanding of the doctrines of the ELCA and UMC, the parent denominations of SonRise Church. In the pre-project questionnaire, participants appeared to have at least a minimal understanding of the doctrines of each denomination but did not consider major differences between them. After the project, the participants reported that their understanding did improve and believed there to be more similarities than differences between the two denominations. One participant wrote, "I feel we have more in common than not, so [my understanding]

really did not change." Another responded, "I always thought our beliefs were the same. I love being a Lutheran and a Methodist." A third responded, "I know more about each doctrine and realized how alike we are." These responses showed that there was, at the least, a minimal amount of learning that took place during the project team review and reported back on the sections of "Confessing our Life Together," full-communion agreement between the ELCA and UMC. This provided a foundation from which the team could understand the things they have in common.

One of the questions on the pre- and post-project questionnaire asked the participants about their current understanding of the mission of SonRise Church. Half of the participants responded in support of justice mission programs like feeding the poor, rather than considering a mission to be a purpose statement. Consequently, there was some initial work was needed to explain that a mission statement is a statement of purpose, not a plan to serve the poor in the community and beyond. Several others understood their mission to be a more personal one, such as growing their personal faith in Jesus Christ. Only one participant understood that part of the mission of the church was to make disciples of Jesus Christ. When asked about the corporate feeling of the mission of SonRise Church, again responses were centered on doing mission work and participating in justice initiatives, by helping others in the name of Jesus Christ. It surprised me to see that people did not understand that a mission statement was a statement of purpose rather than a support program for the needy.

On the post-project questionnaire, the participants displayed a clearer understanding of a mission statement and why an organization would have such a statement. The interdisciplinary foundation which explored the importance of mission

statements in business and industry helped to clarify this for the project team. In the post-project questionnaire, the project team was asked how they planned to support the new mission of SonRise Church. The responses ranged from monetary support for the church to a commitment of time, gifts, and talents, to working to help others to understand the mission and vision statements. This was displayed in two responses which said, "I will help folks understand the church's mission," and "I hope to come up with new ways to connect with others and grow in God's word." These last two statements specifically demonstrated a more comprehensive understanding of what the mission of the church is. The mission goes beyond serving others to showing others how a relationship with God can build the kingdom of God and provide support for others faith development.

The post-project questionnaire also asked if the team members believed that other members of the church will support the new mission of SonRise Church. Overall, the feeling was that the church members would support the new mission of the church. However, participants expressed some hesitancy about the overall commitment of the congregation. Specifically, team members wondered if the congregational members would commit to do the work of the church. It was suggested that the new mission statement needed to be communicated clearly to the congregation, and that there needed to be some excitement around the implementation of that statement.

Ultimately, there was a great feeling of accomplishment from the project team that worked to develop these statements. Team members expressed renewed hope in the direction of the church. One participant shared, "I am excited to be part of the compass of the church to help myself and others find the right direction." Several were pleased that

the mission statement was rooted in scripture, which was where the church needed to remain.

Group Discussions

The goals of the group discussions were to further engage with one another, to engage with the foundational topics of the project, and to glean information from the participants around the brainstorming questions in order to develop the mission and vision statements.

In the first workshop meeting, I presented the history of the legacy churches involved in the project and developed a visual timeline of that history and how events in the life of the individual churches overlapped. I asked the participants about their observations. They noted that events in history responded to population trends as well as significant events in history including the depression, industrial revolution, building of the railroad, civil rights movement, women's rights movement, and COVID-19 pandemic. It was interesting to see how the events at each church overlapped and when there were times with no events for any of the churches. It was particularly interesting to the Lutheran members of the project team to note that their worship services began in the German language and did not convert to the English language until into the twentieth century, nearly one hundred years after Ohio became a state.

In the second workshop meeting, the group discussion began by reacting to the Biblical teaching from Ephesians 4:1-16, the unity in the body. Then they moved into a time of brainstorming around the idea of who they were as SonRise Church, and what they valued. There was a great deal of discussion about the topic with the ideas falling

into several categories, which included that the members were friendly with one another, welcoming, loving, caring, helpful, service-focused, federation, leaders, and provided quality worship both in person and on-line. This activity led to the identification of the core values of love, care, service, and discipleship.

The third workshop meeting included a presentation on the priesthood of all believers. As they considered how this applied to SonRise Church, it was mentioned that they take care of one another physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The review of the full-communion agreement between the United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church showed how the two denominations held much of the same doctrinal standards. Central to that were the beliefs in a triune God, Jesus Christ as Lord, and Son of God, the statements in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, Baptism and Holy Communion. Their beliefs differed mostly around issues of polity and history. Several stated that their different histories helped to enhance their beliefs. It was interesting to note that the priority for the Lutheran Church was to proclaim the word, and the priority of the Methodist Church was to make disciples. Both were key values of each denomination. For SonRise Church, the project team felt this meant that the church should increase their evangelism efforts and focus on living justly in response to their faith.

The brainstorming focused on the question, who was their neighbor and how could they better serve God. There was a wide range of answers, and most centered around helping others and addressing issues of injustice. As a church, they responded that they needed to do a better job of identifying and addressing the needs of the community, connecting with others both inside and outside the congregation, and building their own

faith so that they can share it with others. One participant summarized it saying, “We just need to pay attention to the people around us.” Another shared, “We need to be the ones to take the initiative.” In response, I suggested that all of this pointed to building relationships. There was consensus that this was correct, but they still expressed hesitation.

The fourth workshop meeting included a presentation of the historical foundation for the project that was centered on Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. In the discussion that followed about Count Zinzendorf, the project team appreciated the way that Count Zinzendorf embraced his convictions even in the face of the many challenges he experienced. They also noted that central to his work was the belief that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, while the rest was just details around that primary belief. The brainstorming focused on the idea of who they wanted to be or how they wanted to be seen in the community. After a great deal of discussion and expressed concern about the future of the church, the overarching feeling of the participants was that they wanted to grow as a church, yet remain small enough to feel like a family, become more diverse, give back to the community, and provide a joyful, positive worship experience.

The fifth workshop meeting began with a presentation of the interdisciplinary foundation of developing mission statements and then shared the mission and core values of the parent denominations. It was interesting that the core values of forgiveness and reconciliation rose to the top as two of the most important core values when the values of making disciples and proclaiming the gospel were highlighted in previous weeks. I attributed this to a recent, difficult, family disagreement within the congregation that led to an even greater conflict within the church membership. The brainstorming focused on

how they, as a church, wanted to be known in the larger community. The primary responses were to be a God-centered congregation who were outwardly focused on loving their neighbors. Being loving, caring, and welcoming continued to be a primary value.

At the sixth and final workshop meeting, we reviewed the previous work the project team had completed, reminding the group of the answers to the questions of who they were, what they valued, how they can better serve God, who they wanted to be, and their core values. I then shared several options for their mission and vision statements. After some discussion, wordsmithing, and rearranging, the project team chose their final statements.

The new mission of SonRise Church is to embody the love of Jesus Christ through loving God, growing in Christ, serving our neighbors, and cultivating a community of grace. The new vision of SonRise Church is to be a beacon of hope where relationships are built, diversity is celebrated, and Christ is glorified. The new core values of SonRise Church are love, care, service, and discipleship. Finally, they selected the theme verse for SonRise Church. It is John 13:34, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

I then asked for input on the process and how they felt about the decisions that the project team made. There was a feeling of accomplishment, and the team members appeared excited and motivated to share it with others and to begin to live in their new mission and vision. One participant said, “I was afraid to participate because I did not think I was smart enough to write a mission and vision statement, but the process made it

so easy." Another shared, "It was great how it all came together so easily. Things just fell into place." And another, "This is very important."

Post-Project Follow up Interviews

Following the six-week project meetings, I met with the participants individually to answer any questions about the process and results, as well as to glean any additional input following the meetings. I asked each participant how they felt about the new mission and vision statements. Overall, they were pleased and excited about the new mission and vision statements they developed. They felt it was nice to have unity and focus about who they were and who they wanted to be as a church. Several participants shared that their favorite part of the workshops was learning the history of the three churches who were part of the federation. It was interesting to understand how all the legacy churches experienced similar events around the same time in their histories. This information should be shared with the entire church community.

Participants shared that they felt the foundational information was educational and well presented. It helped them to understand not only the local church history but how each denomination evolved through the years, what they believed, and what they had in common. One participant suggested that if the church focused on what the churches have in common, the differences will no longer matter.

The dynamics of the group worked well. The participants were all respectful of one another, got to know one another better and became closer friends and better congregation members because of their time together. This highlighted how relationship building helps their community to grow. One even stated that she was surprised that so

many of the participants were on the same page with regard to the ideas presented. However, one member of the group was an outlier. Throughout the process, her worries rose to the surface. This was apparent in her pre- and post-project questionnaires, as well as her follow-up interview. She became more negative and almost depressed about the situation of the church found itself in as the project continued. Her feelings went beyond concern to worry that the church would not fully adopt a mission statement, saying that change is hard for old people. While she tended to be the negative voice in most activities, I had hoped that this activity would help her to experience more joy in the church.

Several members did voice their appreciation for being part of the process. They felt good about the work they did, and it gave participants hope for the future of the church. Not only did they have hope, but they also enjoyed the activities and brainstorming in the group. Some indicated that the process made it easy to brainstorm and dream about a future for their congregation. One even said, “The process really did work!”

A recommendation from a follow-up interview was to clearly define some of the words in the mission. Two participants did not know the meaning of the word “embody.” Continued work should include considering who the mission is for and carefully avoiding churchy language that some may misinterpret or may not understand.

Conclusion

The previous chapters provided biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundation support for the project problem that the members did not

have a unified approach to ministry; this chapter presented an analysis after evaluating the hypothesis. The hypothesis for this project was, “In a newly merged and federated congregation, if they developed a common mission and vision statements for the church, members will have an increased sense of community and a renewed and unified purpose for long-term ministry.” The work of the project team explored the questions of who they were and who they wanted to be in order to identify core values of the congregation and formulate mission and vision statements for the church. The project ultimately confirmed the hypothesis as a solution to the problem for the participants of the project.

Overall, I was pleased with the outcome and how the project progressed and excited about the new mission and vision statements for the church. Beyond learning the material itself and developing the mission statement, there was the opportunity for the participants to build relationships across denominational borders. This occurred through the learning process, brainstorming sessions, sharing ideas, voicing concerns, working toward a common goal, fellowship, and shared experiences.

One observation related to this project is that the personality of the group leader made an impact on the results. A leader who is not excited about mission and vision statements for the church, or is not a strong group leader, will most likely not be able to create enthusiasm and forward motion from the participants. Other initiatives that support the unity of the church but were not included in the project were two-fold. First, I developed a monthly Membership Spotlight article for the church newsletter. This highlighted different members each month which allowed people to learn more about one another in an entertaining and educational way. The second was the development of the

Fun committee. This committee was responsible for creating and helping with activities so the congregation could celebrate and laugh together.

At this time, I am not convinced that the resulting excitement and energy created by this new focus for the church will extend to the entire congregation, or even to the entire leadership team. However, I am encouraged that the participants are sharing their experiences with others and refocusing their own ministries around the new mission and vision statements of the church.

Another hindrance to the successful embracing and implementation of this by the entire congregation is that within six weeks of completion of the project, it was announced that I was to be reappointed to another congregation. This effectively thwarted my chances to observe, guide, support and assist in the reinforcement and long-term application of this strategy to the entire congregation. Additional time to share and reinforce the learning and the application of the new mission and vision statements would have provided more incentive for the congregation to adopt and internalize the new statements and implement new initiatives. Reinforcement is a crucial element in the implementation of new initiatives. Such reinforcement would have included sharing the new mission in sermons and how it applied to ministry of the church, developing a series of newsletter articles that explained the mission and vision statements of the church. One thing that was done to keep the mission and vision statements visible and central to the congregation was the hanging of colorful, attractive posters around the church building. The mission was also included in the Sunday bulletins and monthly newsletters and highlighted at leadership team meetings.

As the researcher for the project, I recommend that this project be done before the federation or merger so that the congregation has a unified focus before the merger is finalized. It would also help churches considering a merger to determine if they are compatible congregations. Church mergers should not be undertaken simply for the purpose of church survival. Church mergers and federations should be strategically planned and undertaken to accomplish a specific goal or ministry, to expand the kingdom of God, to create a unified approach to ministry and service in the community and to empower the new church to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Another positive outcome of this project, but not related to the hypothesis, was that the time this project team spent together also gave these leaders at SonRise Church an opportunity to address their concerns about the church, and they created ideas on how to resolve those concerns. Particularly, the name SonRise Church was a new name and not yet recognized in the community. The work of this project team highlighted how important name recognition was for their community. There was a need to tell their story to the community and share the mission and values as the church has a great deal to offer, heightening the presence of the church in the community. With the withering number of print newspapers, newsletters, and physical community bulletin boards, it was imperative that this church and its members searched for other avenues to spread their desire to build the kingdom of God. The project team also developed some ideas to build upon that will address specific needs in the community.

Reflecting on the research project, I would have done a few things differently. First, I would have had a larger group to work with so that more people would have had the opportunity to provide input on the mission and vision statements of the church. My

initial desire was to have more participants; however, the church members did not opt into the training. They may have been skeptical about the process or the success of the endeavor, had other commitments, had a fear of change, a lack of interest or even a lack of caring on their part. To change the perspective of those reluctant leaders, it may be possible to host mini workshops as part of church council or leadership team meetings to refocus existing congregations around a new mission and vision.

As more churches struggle to maintain relevance in the community, a refocus of mission or purpose has become necessary to serve the community and to love God and neighbor. This format may be an option for those churches who wish to recast themselves to move forward in ministry, respond to community needs, and build up the kingdom of God.

APPENDIX A

PRE- AND POST- PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRES

Pre-Project Questionnaire Participant Number _____

1. How would you describe unity within SonRise church and how do you experience it? Feel free to provide examples.

2. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is none and 10 is completely understand, what is your level of understanding of the doctrine of the ELCA and UMC churches – what we stand for and what we believe?
Please explain why you chose this answer.

3. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is none and 10 is completely understand, what do you believe is the other members' level of understanding of the doctrine of the ELCA and UMC churches – what we stand for and what we believe.
Please explain why you chose this answer.

4. What do you understand the mission of SonRise Church to be? In what ways do you, personally, support this mission of our church?

5. How is your understanding of the mission of SonRise Church different than other members' understanding of the church mission? In what ways do others personally support the mission of our church?

6. What do you hope to learn from this project?

7. What questions or concerns do you have about developing a mission for SonRise Church?

8. How do you feel about the current direction of SonRise Church? Why?

Post-Project Questionnaire **Participant Number _____**

1. How has the feeling of unity you experience at SonRise changed after this project? Feel free to provide examples.

2. How hopeful are you about the future of this church and why?

3. In what ways do you want to make a difference in the church? And in the community?

4. How has your understanding of our ELCA and UMC doctrines changed?

5. In what ways do you plan to support the new mission of SonRise Church?

6. In what ways do you believe others will support the new mission of SonRise Church?

7. What did you learn from your participation in this project?

8. What questions or concerns do you still have about the new mission of SonRise Church?

9. Overall, how do you feel about the future direction of SonRise Church? And why?

APPENDIX B

DIRECTED BRAINSTORMING QUESTIONS

Directed Brainstorming Questions

Who Are We?

Strengths – What can we build on?

- What are we good at?
- What makes our church special, different, distinct, unique?
- What do we do well?
- What are we most proud of as a church?
- What is our greatest strength?
- What are our proudest achievements in the past year or two?
- How do we use our strengths?
- How do our strengths fit with our mission to make disciples?
- What do we value?

Opportunities – What are our members/friends/neighbors looking for?

Part 1 -

- Who are our neighbors?
- Who do we serve?

Part 2

- How can we better serve the area/our community/our neighbor?
- How can we better serve church members and friends?
- How can we better serve people outside the city/state/country?
- How can we better serve God?
- How can we listen for and hear the whisper of the Holy Spirit…what is God saying to us?
- Who are possible new members or friends of the church? Or returning?
- How are we different from other churches in the area?
    - Arcanum Faith,
    - Arcanum Trinity
    - Family of God
    - Castine
    - Trinity Lutheran
- What programs can we offer to serve the community?

Limitations – What are we missing?

- What do we need to be successful that we currently do not have?
- What are some areas that we are not prepared to expand with our current resources?
- What skills, resources, talents do we need to move forward?

Who Do We Want to Be

Aspirations –

- What do we care deeply about?
- What does the building look like?
- How many people are there?
- What do they look like?
- What are we doing? – Worshipping – what else?
- How are we serving the community?
- What do we value as a church?
- What do we value?
- What is important to us?
- Why are you a part of our church?
- What are we deeply passionate about?
- What are our most compelling aspirations?
- Are they consistent with our mission?
- What types of initiatives support our aspirations?

APPENDIX C

FOCUSED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Focused Individual Interviews

Participant Identification Number: _____

Interview questions may include:

1. How did you feel about the foundation information shared in the sessions?

2. Are there any thoughts or ideas that you want to share with me that you did not feel comfortable sharing with the larger group?

3. Is there anything you think we should add to the mission/vision statement?

4. Since participating in the workshops what excites you about serving as a leader in this congregation? What concerns you?

5. What other insights, questions, or concerns do you still have?

APPENDIX D

PROJECT MODULES

Outline of Project Modules

Week 1 -

- Explanation of project and agreements to participate.
- Verify completion of the Informed Consent Form
- Opening Prayer
- Administer pre-project questionnaire.
- Presentation of the history of the local churches
- Development of timeline activity
- Discussion of timeline
- Brainstorming practicing activity
- Closing Prayer

Week 2 -

- Opening Prayer
- Review of previous week
- Presentation of Biblical Foundation
- Discussion of Biblical Foundation
- Brainstorming "Who Are We" Questions
- Closing Prayer

Week 3 –

- Opening Prayer
- Review of previous weeks
- Presentation of Theological Foundation
- Discussion of Theological Foundation
- Subgroups review the Full-Communion Agreement between the ELCA and UMC and report their findings.
- Discussion of findings from the Full-Communion Agreement
- Brainstorming "Who Is Our Neighbor" and "How can we better serve God?" questions.
- Closing Prayer

Week 4 -

- Opening Prayer
- Review of previous weeks
- Presentation of Historical Foundation
- Discussion of Historical Foundation
- Brainstorm "How are we different from other churches?" "Who do we want to be?" and "How do we want to be known?" questions.
- Closing Prayer

Week 5 -

- Opening Prayer
- Review of Previous Weeks
- Presentation on the Interdisciplinary Foundation
- Discussion on the Interdisciplinary Foundation
- Presentation of Core Values of the ELCA and UMC
- Discussion of Core Values
- Brainstorming core values.
- Brainstorming aspirations
- Brainstorming on what do we need to reach our goals?
- Closing Prayer

Week 6 –

- Opening Prayer
- Sharing of potential mission and vision statements, wordsmithing and selection of final mission and vision statements
- Selection of core values of the church
- Selection of the theme scripture verse to support mission and vision of church
- Brainstorming on theme Final presentation of the mission statement, vision statement, and core values for the church.
- Final presentation of the theme scripture verse of the church.
- Planning of unveiling celebration for the full congregation.
- Sharing of appreciation for work well done.
- Closing Prayer
- Administer post-project questionnaire.

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